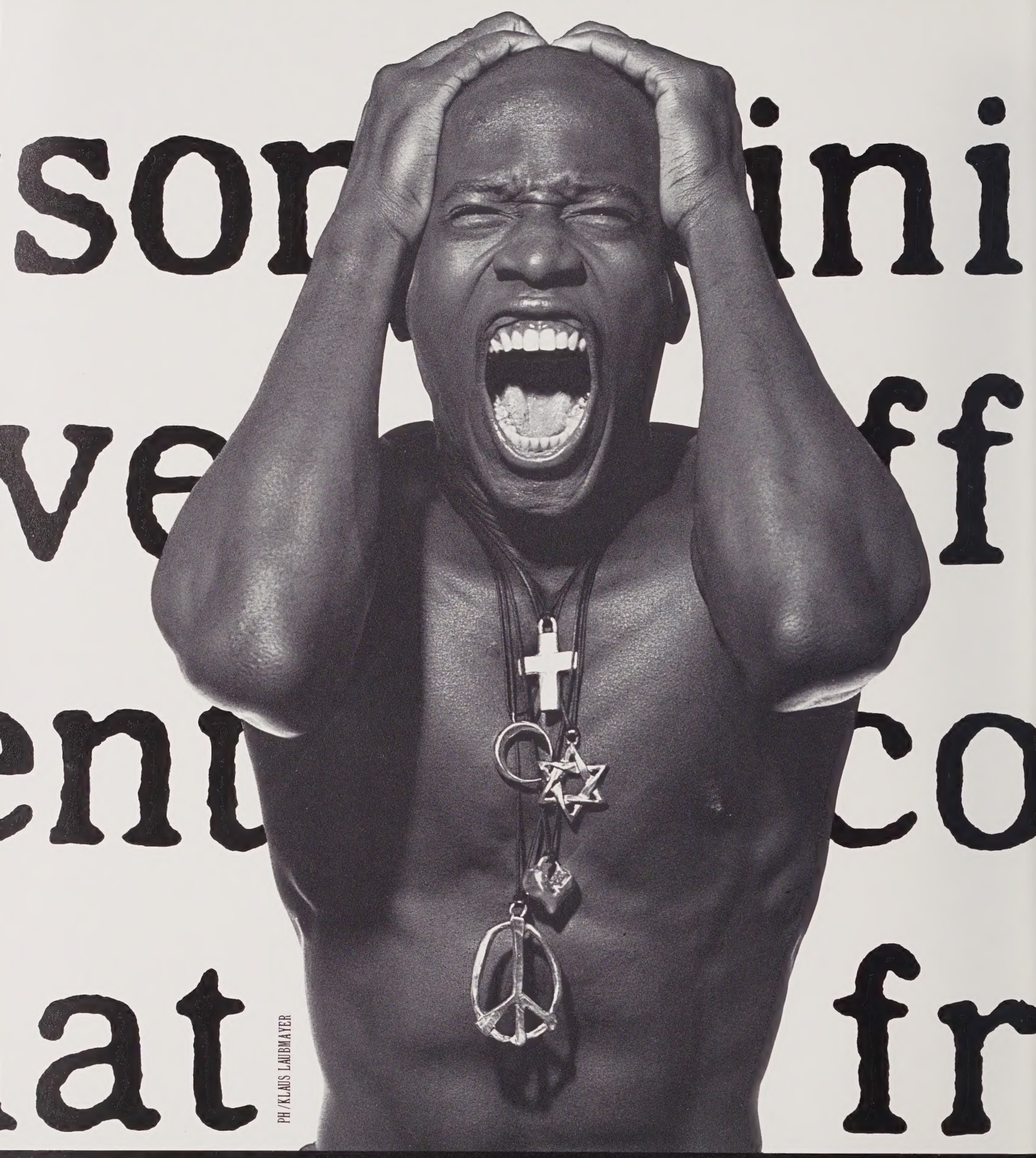
# Metalsmith

SUMMER 1991
VOLUME II NUMBER 3
$7

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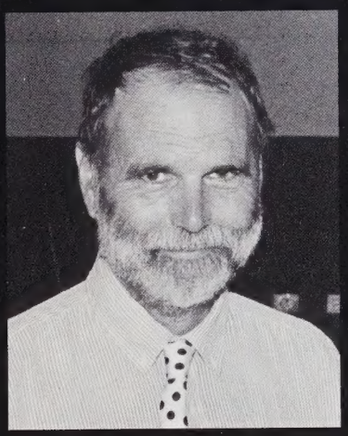

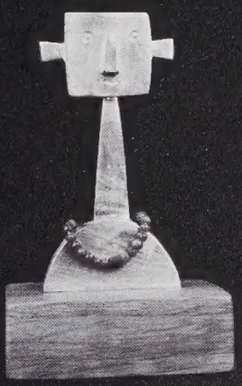

*Woman with Necklace*, 1991
4" H, silver with cornelian beads

**Czech Modern: 1991 • Pavel Banka, Anton Cepka, Vratislav K. Novák and Pavel Opočenský. Rescheduled for September 1991. Date to be announced.**

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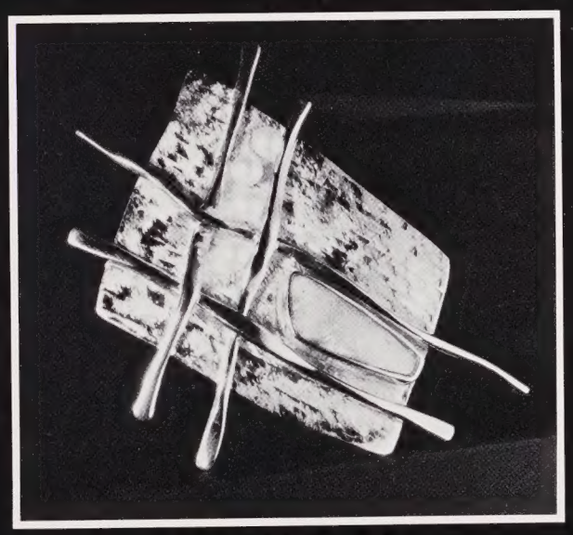

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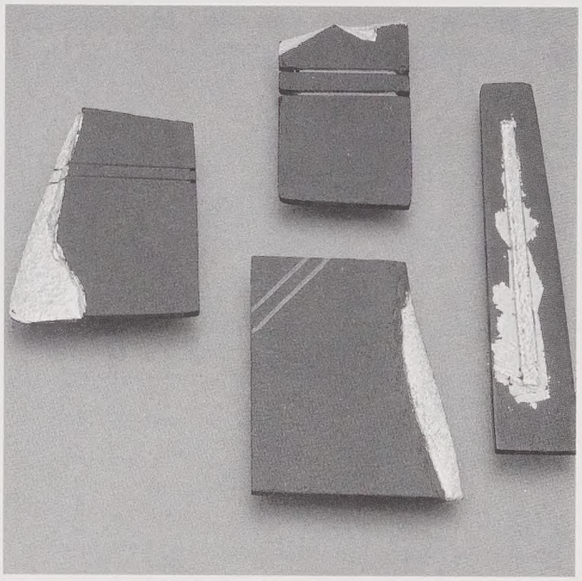

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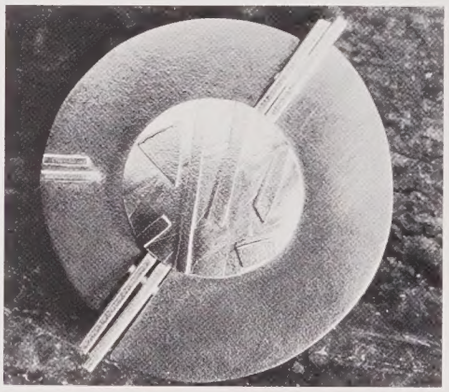

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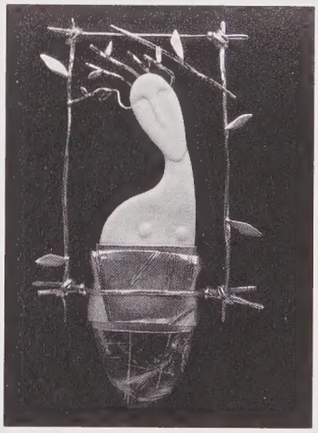

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Metalsmith

Summer 1991

Volume 11 Number 3

*The Isleta Tinsmith*
frame containing Benziger oleograph
31 1/4 x 22 1/2", c. 1905
Private collection, Santa Fe
From *New Mexican Tinwork, 1840–1940*
by Lane Coulter and Maurice Dixon, Jr.
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**Cover**
John Marshall
*Growth Cycle*
sterling silver, acrylic
11 x 7 x 9.5"
Collection: White Rose Foundation
Photo: Jerry Davis
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# Editorial

There was a revolt at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1985, or, at least, a cultural conflict. Inside, at the time, the Art of the Maori, a much-publicized blockbuster show of "newfound" primitive art was tantalizing Manhattan's cosmopolitan audience, while outside, the Maori people themselves, or a representative contingent flown in from half-way around the world, were railing against the apparent cultural rape of their native, sacred symbols. "Our artifacts are not art. They represent us, the Maori people, yesterday, today, tomorrow," proclaimed their leader, spokeswoman Titewhai Harawira. While the Maori's protest did little to abate the tide of visitors to the museum nor temper the enthusiasm for this type of ethno-rama, it was an authentic demonstration of a people's ties to their art as historically synonymous with their cultural spirit and national identity.

Throughout the 1980s, this issue of cultural preeminence embattled the artworld, when events such as the "'Primitivism' in 20th-Century Art" show at the Museum of Modern Art and even the opening of the Women's Museum in Washington became salvos for arguing the case of a socio-political-cultural-ethnic-gender community's right to its own distinct and protected cultural expression, free from constant assimilation and imperialism. It was also, then, not surprising that by the end of the 80s, when we in the craft community had our own blockbuster show, "The Eloquent Object," the cultural agenda was apparent, as critics like Lucy Lippard and anthropologists like Edwin Wade joined in proclaiming through their catalog essays the essential enterprise of craft as one of affirming its own cultural context. They proposed that, like the Maori, North American craftspeople continue to find historical relevance in their work as artmakers for their indigenous communities. Following this logic, like the Maori's complaint with the Met, the improprieties of showing craft objects in a sterile arena like an urban museum essentially colonizes and recategorizes them, extracting them from their authentic roots and robbing them of their traditional and current value.

I am glad to say that this furor of the 80s has not abated, at least not in the artworld in its debate with the world of anthropology. Last summer, the Zuni Indians were successful in retrieving from a number of museums and private collections a group of rare wooden statues of tribal war gods, some of them over a century old. The statues, once protected in the controlled climate of modern museology, were placed by the Zunis in a traditional open-air shrine. Exposed to the elements, over time, they will disintegrate and eventually disappear. For the Zunis, these objects can only fulfill their specified religious purposes by allowing them to live out their natural cycle as an organic part of Zuni culture. For Western curators, such treatment appears unconscionable, trained as they are to preserve artifacts at all costs as a symbol of culture's immortality. The Zunis have raised the ante, resisting Western curatorial wisdom in a renewal of their faith in community and tradition.

But, I am sorry to say that the craft community, with the rare exception of essays in "The Eloquent Object" catalog, shows little interest in entering the current debate. There appears to be little concern for identifying craft production, both function and nonfunctional, with a community or interest group that shares ethnic, cultural, gender or regional characteristics. In short, there seems to be a reluctance to make and talk about craft as culture-specific. This can be accounted for to some extent by the fact that, the American Indian notwithstanding, we do not have a cultural community as ancient and noble as the Maori's; ours is an immigrant species, transplanted from European roots. The closest we have come to identifying cultural roots of our own is in our preoccupation with folk art – a peculiarly American phenomenon – which, since the late 19th century, has acted as our cathartic rediscovery of an indigenous expression of bygone communities, many of which still exist, preserved in backward conditions of our poorest and most naive peoples. Michael Hall, who has pioneered the interchange of folk, craft and fine art as forging a true modern cultural expression has said, "What interests me about folk art..is not the idiom itself but the way in which folk-made objects as art witness to the dynamic character of the thing we call culture."

This interest in "material culture," a new burgeoning academic discipline that weighs the importance of art on the basis of its "witnessing" the evolution of culture, is particularly suited to the American condition, where we as a society dominated by a Western peoples cannot look back. Steeped in the notion of progress, we cannot be resolutely naive, not willfuly unself-conscious in our role as the great self-made nation. Yet, as an open community, we find ourselves a conglomerate of non-Western peoples, who challenge the paucity of our culture, who ask if we can truly proceed with an ersatz homogeneity in place of an authentic and vital cultural heritage.

Craft, then, stands as an anomaly of some importance. Never really accepted in the Western notion of progress, it nevertheless enters the minds of those like Lippard or Hall who come from outside its practice. Craft is intractably self-conscious of its development as a cultural activity. On one hand, it has been readopted in the 20th century as a revolt against the progress of Western industrialization, partaking of the benefits of modern art, design and commerce without actually assimilating into current social systems. And on the other, it has been romantically looking to pasts of all cultures to establish a basis for acceptance, searching for something that has been lost or forgotten in our own cultural evolution.

I believe that the talk of cultural pluralism as the overriding direction of the late 20th century includes and must include the craft enterprise. It has been the craft challenge for almost a century now that our production of artifacts must find a connection with our sense of community. While the face of the different communities that make up our society is not always clear, rarely following past models, the need still exists to identify these communities and, in fact, identify them through artifacts, confirming the relationship between a people and their objects.

In this issue, some of the potential for this identification surfaces in the work of Charles Loloma, the internationally reknown Hopi jeweler who worked to reinvigorate his community through a renewal and reinterpretation of one of its most valued crafts. Keith Lewis's exposition of body piercing identifies a group of a different kind. Using primitive, ritualistic body adornment in a modern application of counterculture proportions, his startling dislocation of values virtually creates an identity through the symbolism of the act of adornment itself. Susan Kingsley, continuing on her earlier work of ornament and its relationship in determining the image of women in society, addresses mainstream cultural/gender issues that invade the tradition of jewelry. And while continuing to profile individual artists such as Claire Falkenstein and John Marshall, we hope the plurality of different approaches to our community's work promotes just such a dialogue that raises the consciousness of diversity. If there is a tendency to bemoan the metalsmithing community as too diverse, consider the positive cultural results of the Maori position that "our art represents us." As Michael Hall notes, it is better to view the diversity in "conditions of interchange, rather than in conditions of opposition" to create a unified cultural context.

— SB


# Metalsmith

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*Editor:* Sarah Bodine
*Design:* Mary Melilli, Richard Mehl
*Circulation:* Bob Mitchell
*Contributing Editors:* Jamie Bennett, Bruce Metcalf, Bernard Bernstein, Robert Cardinale, Elizabeth Skidmore Sasser, C.E. Licka, Deborah Norton
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Bob Mitchell, 5009 Londonderry Drive, Tampa, FL 33647
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**Address editorial material to:**
Sarah Bodine, Editor
7089 N. River Road, Star Route 73,
New Hope, PA 18938, FAX (215) 862-2004
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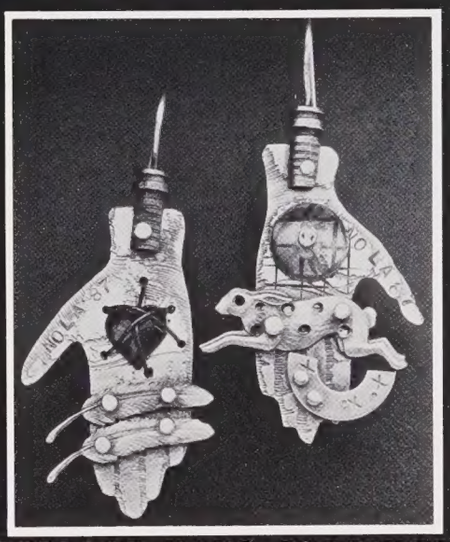

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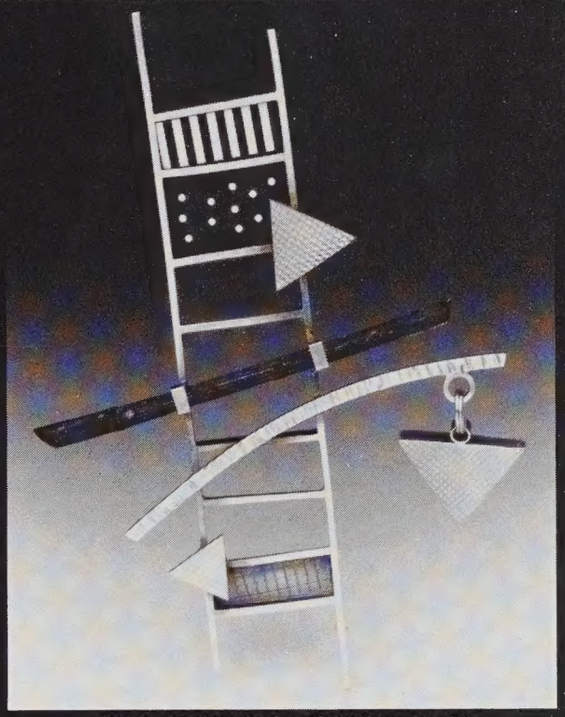

EDIE TANIS BRENNA, brooch, "ACROBAT", 14K 22K gold, formica, twig

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# Letters

Dear Editor:

I have just read Janet Koplos' review of "Silver: New Forms and Expressions II," (Spring '91) and would like to shed some light on the review's inaccuracies, inadequacies and inappropriateness.

Inaccuracy is perhaps the easiest to address simply because wrong is wrong and is not debatable. Ms. Koplos states that only Randy Long's winning teapot was displayed in the front window, and that the other award winners were placed at the back of the first floor and "were easily missed." I was informed by Rosanne Raab, the organizer of the show (and a woman who has put herself in the thankless position of wanting to do more for metalsmiths than we seem to be willing to let her do) that Ms. Koplos visited Fortunoff's on the day the exhibition was being dismantled and missed seeing all of the winning entries in the Fifth Avenue window during the two-and-a-half weeks that they were there.

The review's inadequacies can only be discussed in terms of what should have been addressed. Ms. Koplos' review gives no clue as to why and by whom the show was initially conceived, and, indeed, judging by the topics addressed in her review, one wonders if she did enough homework to find out the organizers' intent. SNAG, Rosanne Raab, the prospectus for the show, or the catalog itself could easily have provided that information. The fact that an article on the show was published a year ago does not mean that it is familiar to those who did not read it nor that it is remembered by those who did.

So, what was the fundamental idea behind organizing the Fortunoff exhibitions? It was not, as she alludes, "the 'celebratory nature of silver.'" While it was indeed a celebration of the way in which silver is being used by contemporary metalsmiths, it was not intended to focus on the intrinsic celebratory nature of silver itself. This exhibition, rather, was intended to be the second of three exhibitions, which, when viewed as a whole, would provide a historical view of the current trends in silver done by the "best" of both established and emerging silversmiths. Whether or not the show succeeds in that capacity would have been a valuable topic for discussion in the review – not whether or not the pieces had a high polish.

The concept and organization of the Fortunoff exhibitions is a rarity in a world of goofy gallery "theme shows" for which we pay to be juried, pay to ship our work and often pay to get the work returned to us – in essence paying to let galleries provide us with the privilege of showing our work. Not for many years have we seen an exhibition devoted exclusively to silver holloware and flatware, funded by a private company. Fortunoff has acknowledged the importance of what we do by giving us some high-profile exposure in a traveling exhibition. A major retailer of silver objects and antiquities, Fortunoff initiated, set the guidelines for and fully funded the competition to promote new work in silver. Not only was there no entry fee for juried work, but Fortunoff reimbursed the juried artists for the cost of the silver in their objects, provided honoraria for the invited artists and supplied the cash awards. If some would suggest that Fortunoff's motives were self-serving, let's not forget that Fortunoff does not stand to benefit financially by exposing their customers to a resource that perhaps they had not previously discovered – contemporary craftspeople creating one-of-a-kind objects in silver. If more companies would follow Fortunoff's lead, perhaps we would depend a little less on the NEA for exhibition grants. Fortunoff should have been congratulated for its innovative approach to this exhibition. Ms. Koplos, alas, did not even mention them.

Ms. Koplos appears to have an underlying dislike for the show based on curatorial issues, i.e., the inclusion of invited artists in what she says is an exhibition "billed as a competition." If this show is intended to be an accurate, historical view of the best of contemporary silversmithing, both well-known and lesser-known artists must be included. The only way to find the best work being done by emerging artists is to hold a juried competition – that is how lesser-known and unknown talent is found. The only way to include the work of well-known artists is to invite them. Why? I would assume that it is because most well-known artists no longer have the time, energy or desire to enter juried shows. Why should they? They are already established and their energy is stretched to the limit. The invited artists have "competed" in a professional capacity for years and, consequently, their inclusion in a competitive show is within the parameters of the term "competition." To think that well-established artists, some of whom were among the founding members of SNAG, are still entering juried shows is ludicrous at best. If the show is to be true to its purpose – an accurate overview of contemporary work – then it must include the lesser-known juried section as well as the well-known invited section. And why, Ms. Koplos, make a distinction between the two groups on the labels of the work? So that the invited work will set the standard by which the juried work is viewed? That, in my estimation, would serve no purpose. As for the assertion that the invited work clouds the issue because some of it is "older," most of the invited entrants created pieces specifically for this show, and the blame for those who did not lies with the individual artist, not with the curating of the show.

My last major concern with this review is the inappropriate and unnecessary attack on the invited artists – some of whom Ms. Koplos singled out by name. Why attack invited artists simply because they were invited and acknowledged the importance of the exhibition by creating work for it? Attack the work itself if you are so inclined, but don't attack the artist for accepting the invitation. The fact that some of the invited participants created work that alluded to vessel forms rather than actually *being* vessel forms seems to bother Ms. Koplos. Artists including Jamie Bennett, from "Fortunoff I," Bob Ebendorf and Linda Threadgill, do not traditionally work in the format of the "vessel," yet have created substantial bodies of work incorporating silver as a material. It was a curatorial decision to acknowledge their work and their contributions to the field, through the use of silver, and their inclusion – despite the fact that their pieces alluded to rather than *being* vessel forms – is perfectly consistent with the spirit of the exhibition. If vessel as metaphor is a concept that eludes Ms. Koplos, perhaps she should not be writing about crafts. If the juried participants took "vessel" more literally, as a group, than did the invited participants, then perhaps that would have been another interesting topic for discussion.

Finally, the incredible diversity of technique and design as showcased by a retailer of manufactured objects – no small irony – was not even touched on. At the conclusion of "Fortunoff III," the final in this series of exhibitions, it is my hope that an in-depth discussion of the historical significance of this undertaking is published in *Metalsmith*. And, at that time, I also hope that credit is given for its inception, organization and funding where it is due – namely, Rosanne Raab, Fortunoff and SNAG.

Robert Farrell
Ft. Atkinson, WI

*Janet Koplos responds:*

Reviewing a group show is always a hopeless task. Within about 500 words you've got to provide some general overview and discuss a few works that are significant for either positive or negative reasons. Mr. Farrell's letter, please note, is nearly twice as long as my review.

May I draw a few conclusions from this letter?

1. The organizer is more important to shaping the show than the judges, whom Mr. Farrell does not mention.

2. It is "inaccurate" to see what shouldn't have been, such as prize-winning works moved to a disadvantageous location before the show closes. (I saw the show unannounced, unescorted and unexplained – just as any customer would have – and that's what I saw.)

3. Readers of this magazine aren't expected to remember reviews that are printed a year apart but would recall all segments of an exhibition spread over three years.

4. Olaf Skoogfors is to blame for not having created new work for last year's show.

5. Bob Edendorf is above criticism.

Mr. Farrell takes me to task for not focusing on the show overall, but when I discuss an aspect of the subject he's equally unhappy. I think mixing juried and invitational is a problem, a curatorial weakness. Also, I think the differences between the invited and juried works are of major importance, because they suggest changing esthetics that come with changing times. I don't know where he gets the idea that I object to allusive work, unless he's remembering my complaint about Jamie Bennett showing something that didn't fit the holloware/flatware theme – but that was last year. It's that recurrent problem: why should purely art works hide out in functional shows?

Obviously, Mr. Farrell and I have very different ideas of what reviews are. He's interested in the politics, sociology and history of the show, but I'm interested in the visual objects. To me, reviewing means discussing the works and their presentation. It is not equivalent to doing the acknowledgments at a testimonial dinner.

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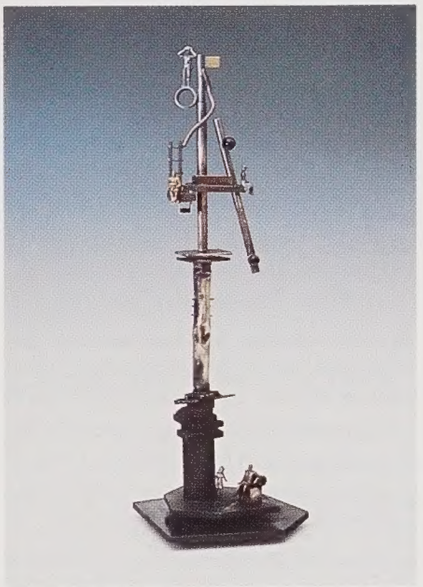

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# Beyond the Bench

*by Jan Yager*

## On Sabbaticals for Studio Jewelers

You know the feeling. No matter what you do there's never enough time! Well, after 17 very long years I finally managed to "buy" some. Here is how, and why, I did it. Where it will lead me, only time will tell.

There is nothing new about needing a sabbatical; taking one feels like a fantasy fulfilled. But unlike the fairy tales, this one only lasts as long as my savings.

The word sabbatical stems from the word "Sabbath," or seventh day of rest and worship. Ancient Judea observed a year of rest for the land every seventh year. Farmers worldwide throughout recorded history have had the good sense to periodically allow their fields to lay fallow. In nature it is well established that nothing can yield unrelentingly, without pause, without rest.

Student loans rescued me the last time I felt the need for a spurt of artistic growth: a BFA in jewelry from Western Michigan University and six years of Midwest craft fairs had brought me as far as they could. Going to graduate school at Rhode Island School of Design allowed me time to develop new ideas into new work. Then over the next few years, this time in the Northeast, I established a "following" at the wholesale/retail craft fairs. Hard work, careful budgeting, luck and dogged perseverance finally won out. I had survived the buffeting of the marketplace with the original spirit of my work intact. What more could I ask for? I had achieved financial stability with a minimum of artistic compromise.

A business can be great once it is working – as long as you remember that you set the standards, and you determine its course. I learned the meaning of good cash flow and discovered what an enabler it could be, as long as I kept sight of my artistic goals. Other than buying a Philadelphia rowhouse, I never changed my spending habits. When sales increased, I plowed them back into my jewelry, allowing me to test out ideas and solve esthetic and technical problems at an accelerated pace. I began to master things I never expected, learn things I never wanted to and accept what I never could. Businesses can also take on a life of their own. What I had so desperately sought began to feel thrust upon me, and the momentum began to propel me without my permission.

The routine I had established was not allowing enough time to explore new directions. I had been on a marathon. The daily demands of business consumed all my time. As a result, ideas accumulated and were shelved, for "when I had more time." It's not that I go looking for new challenges, but I care the most about whether I will last as an artist. I could not afford to stop growing. Repeatedly, I tried to carve out some time, but the responsibilities that came with success began to supersede my personal and artistic needs.

Had I been a professor, I would have been granted a paid sabbatical for research, rest and/or travel, and returned to the same position at the end. As a self-employed artist, I could only be sure that I would end up someplace else, but who could know where?

Research and creative play do not produce immediate income, but this has never lessened their importance to me. That probably stems from seeing the demise of my hometown, Detroit, as its auto executives skimped on quality, research and development and thought no one would notice. I literally bank on my creativity and consider it a resource I must nurture and protect at all costs.

I could see no point in just continuing a jewelry business for the sake of everyone else. It became an artistic imperative to slow down, catch my breath and regain possession of my soul. The galleries were notified, orders were honored on a first-come, first-served basis; I composed the last pieces and they were shipped out. My two assistants found new positions, and the multitude of loose ends that never seemed to cease, finally did. The long-term costs of not taking time outweighed the short-term consequences. For the first time in my life, I needed time more than money.

January 1, 1990: the phone machine took over and I began my time off. I had fantasized for two decades about lying around reading magazines and eating pistachio nuts. So I began at least to read the magazines. About three years each of *American Craft, American Jewelry Manufacturer, Archeology, Art Aurea, Arts & Antiques, Connoisseur, Craft Arts Australia, Crafts UK, Craft Canada, Eclat, Goldsmith, Metropolis, Metropolitan Home, Ornament, Smithsonian,* anything I could get my hands on, page by page. I read books on jewelry and adornment of every time period and culture I could find, book by book.

I went to craft history conferences, historical jewelry conferences, bead and seashell conferences. I attended lectures on sculptors, painters, furniture designers, architects, clay artists. I listened to every creative person I could find. I was like someone emerging from an arid desert with an unquenchable thirst. I fed the birds, I watched the bees pollinate my flower garden, and along the way I rediscovered nature's incredibly perfect design solutions. I read the newspaper, I formed opinions and I wrote notes to myself about jewelry, to newspaper editors about the city, to senators about censorship and the NEA. And, at the end of the year, I even got married to the man who had watched and encouraged me to plow through all of this the past four years.

Knowing that there is no substitute for the real thing, I scoured auction houses, flea markets, jewelry stores, galleries and museums. I touched and wore what I could; I looked at what I couldn't. I researched jewelry from prehistoric to contemporary. I walked Madison Avenue, the Santa Fe Indian Market, the antique stalls of London and the galleries of Amsterdam. But, most of all, I just thought and thought and thought and rolled it all around, savored it and thought about it again.

Creativity for me is a slow process. My ideas are born clumsy and need a long period of incubation. Inspiration rarely visits me uninvited. I tried to gather information without preconceived notions, to just absorb without coming to conclusions too early. My goal was to expose every part of me to as much as possible, to gain a sense of what was out there, where the connections lay and how my work fit in. I no longer wanted to steer by instinct. I knew there were historical precedents for *everything,* and I wanted to learn what they were.

As I began to see what I liked and didn't like, I started to formulate criteria for my next creations. This time I would strive to continue to emphasize uniqueness, include subtle variations, irregularities and nuances, search for more complex forms and intricate textures to savor slowly, make my jewelry hold up at *any* distance and attempt to instill it with the same visual pleasures I discovered in the objects I had studied that made it feel good and want to be touched and worn. I would try to judge objectively, comparing my work with what I had seen and continuing to look for what was there in order to understand just what was not there.

It has been a great opportunity to recharge and reevaluate. I have plowed the soil, gathered the seeds and, now that they have been planted, all I can do is wait and watch how they grow.

If my fantasy were *truly* fulfilled, I would grant a sabbatical year for every artist everywhere. Our lives, our livelihoods, our art are all at their best when successfully interwoven. Like every living organism they feed from, depend upon and nourish each other, and all this takes is time.

---

*Jan Yager lives and works in Philadelphia, PA.*

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# Renegade Ornament

Betty Helen Longhi
*Mask*; jewel for nasal septum and two pierced ears
sterling sliver, fabricated, 1990
Model: Ivo Dominquez Jr.

*by Keith A. Lewis*

Over the last several years, a growing number of North Americans have been obtaining nontraditional pierces. Pierced penises, nipples, navels, clitorides and noses have been proliferating. Sometimes this is the result of individuals reclaiming a signifier of their cultural heritage; as in the resurgence of pierced noses among African-American women. Often, however, these pierces are being obtained among the Anglo majority, which, in this century, has sanctioned only the ear pierce, and that almost exclusively for women.

Cultures, our own included, create acceptable cultural uniforms, which clearly indicate social status and serve as badges of conformity. Thus, we unconsciously make assessments based on three-piece suits, wedding dresses and rings, tennis bracelets and Barbara Bush's pearls. Further, we also assess people based on facial features and bodily appearance. In contrast to these signifiers of conformity, practices like piercing, tatooing and scarification can best be thought of as anticultural phenomena – renegade ornament.

Jewelry for these pierces is much more radical than what we commonly (and smugly) take to be avant-garde. The experimental jewelry that we usually see is created within our small circle in order to preach to the converted – its impact on the larger culture is limited at best. Admiration of "cutting-edge" work is often nothing more than parochial backslap-ping. In light of piercing, what's so radical about a bamboo body necklace; or about a pin that you wear on your shoulder (but only until the slide is shot)?

Piercing is at the center of a complex and frustrating muddle, where taboo, personal expression and a resurgent sexual puritanism are battling for control. Pierces excite considerable emotional reaction and are often not openly displayed by their owners. In the mind of many, including most metalsmiths, they cross some deep ravine into the land of the unacceptable if not the unimaginable. Yet a hoop through a clitoris or nasal septum is clearly ornament just as much as an earring is.

As makers of wearable objects, we metalsmiths concern ourselves with the cultural language of ornament. Whether or not we claim to be producing art, the creation of such objects requires consideration of questions like, "will it be comfortable?" ("should it be comfortable?"), "is it appropriate?" (why should it be?), "is it too unusual?" In asking these questions we are engaged in challenging or accepting cultural definitions of what is considered to be acceptable or appropriate ornament. As additional inducement to explore piercing, metalsmiths should realize that considerable potential for profit exists in these areas.

In exploring piercing, several important factors must be examined, including the range, goals and practice of piercing historically and currently, and the mainstream cultural value system that piercing confronts. This is a difficult challenge, as we are unaccustomed to looking at our own culture and value system with anything close to open eyes, but it presents the possibility of formulating a cultural critique that will help create an environment conducive to diversity and artistic expression.

Piercing can be performed on a wide variety of body sites, including lips, noses, tongues, nipples, navels and in numerous locations on ears and on the male and female genitals. Precedence for piercing such sites is widespread, especially in many African and Southeast Asian cultures. In addition, piercing has existed as an underground practice in the United States for at least four decades. While pierces serve as sites for ornament, their location may limit the number of people who view the ornament, since our culture has elaborate taboos against public display of the female breast as well as female and male genitalia. Thus, the very location of some ornament can make it culturally suspect.

Further, exotic jewelry, even on publicly viewable parts of the body still evokes responses of derision, disgust and taboo. Amidst a sea of rhinestone poodles, Rolex watches and Paloma Picasso nightmares, a bone through the nose acquires a special meaning.

Some uses of piercing are wholly at odds with our traditional concepts of usefulness and ornament. For instance, the physical manipulation of jewelry in some pierce sites, such as penis, labia and nipple, is specifically intended to arouse pleasurable physical sensations. In other words, some of this jewelry makes sex feel better. In fact, some of this jewelry makes even walking down the street feel great.

By offering an honest focus on sex and sexuality, as well as providing a means to enhance sexual pleasure, this jewelry is directly and vigorously challenging strong cultural taboos, while most of us continue to design jewelry to be as passive and comfortable as possible. Though we may occasionally talk about "how good a necklace feels to wear," it probably rarely contributes to our orgasms.

Pierces are also being used to stretch and enlarge various parts of the body, including nipples, earlobes, labia, clitorides and nasal septa. By the insertion of increasingly large pieces of jewelry, by stretching with weights and sometimes simply through the normal healing process, tissue can be induced to change shape and size. This synergistic interaction between jewelry and body is fascinating and provocative and opens up new avenues for personal expression and artistic exploration.

Nontraditional pierces also serve commemorative purposes, being obtained to mark important decisions, milestones or events in people's lives. In a powerful and primal way, they seem to empower by acting as totems and keys to remembrance. They serve as a definition or reaffirmation of self.

Piercing is also sometimes used in trials of endurance and as an indicator of religious devotion. Both the Native American sundance and the Indian ball dance have been adapted to the spiritual needs of a small but growing number of nonnative Americans. The sundance ceremony involves suspension by hooks through temporary pierces in the chest. The process of tearing free from the hooks induces in the participant a state of altered consciousness and a sense of spiritual achievement. The ball dance seeks similar goals but is performed by having small weights, balls or fruits sewn or hooked to the body. Subsequent whirling and dancing heightens the sensations and altered state of awareness. Temporary pierces are also sometimes used simply for the immediate sensations that they provide.

Jewelry for any exotic pierce is designed for use, in response to needs. It fulfills a variety of functions and the designer must carefully consider how to make the jewelry meet its functions and be compatible with the body. In this sense, it is ironically close to the traditional goal of craft.



continued on page 12

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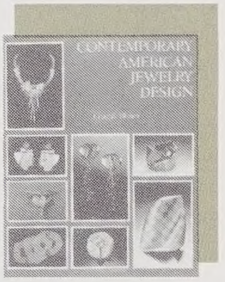


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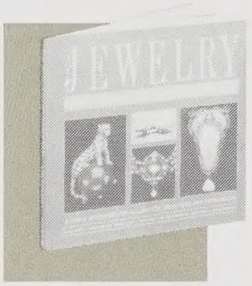


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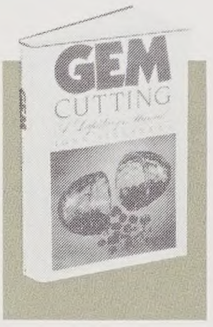


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Keith A. Lewis
*Ivo Suite*
pins for nipples and nasal septum
sterling silver, bronze,
ammonia patination, 1990
Model: Ivo Dominguez Jr.

Regardless of our political beliefs or intellectual stance; regardless of age, background or commitment to diversity; pierces usually prompt in us an immediate and involuntary negative reaction. We are simply not culturally prepared to readily welcome piercing into our world. This gut reaction has been denied by some, often by a superficial overlay of intellectualization. Those who doubt this might consider their response to a dentist or school teacher with shoulder-length earlobes. To consider piercing, though, without questioning its traditional absence from our culture and its emotional implication for our own lives would be to miss its most fascinating qualities.

As a culture, we often adopt a dispassionate anthropologist's mode when viewing the practices and mores of other cultures, particularly those involving body modification or sexual practices. Their difference from us in "quality of life" or technological development permits us to insulate ourselves from other ways of thinking. We must change this habit of viewing other cultures as if they were restricted to the pages of *National Geographic.*

This supercilious cultural imperialism breaks down when we are confronted by a person of our own skin color and social status who sports a pierced nose or nipple. In the face of such a challenge to our conditioned mores, we usually retreat into the assertion that the urge to pierce is somehow sick, that it must represent evidence of pathology, masochism, fetishism, unhappiness or (at least) confusion. Others declare that, plain and simple, piercing is mutilation – an abuse of the body, even as they wear their pierced earrings.

This is not hypocrisy as much as it is denial, denial that our culture affects our opinions and actions profoundly and vigorously, and denial that our culture also sanctions a wide variety of temporary and permanent body modifications. Some of these modifications are harmless, some are mutilatory and many target and constrain the behavior and freedom of women. In the realm of clothing-induced modification, we have seen corsets and high heels, as well as the famous 1950s torpedo-tit. We shave, pluck, curl, color, crimp, wax and electrically remove our hair on head, face, underarms, groin and legs. We remove the foreskins of newborn males. We tan and paint our bodies and we pierce our ears. We suppress normal body odors. And, perhaps most tellingly, we constantly, obsessively try the change the size and shape of our bodies – surgically, through nose-jobs, tummy-tucks, face lifts and liposuction, and non-surgically, through dieting, exercising and by taking steroids. Dissatisfaction with our bodies has even led to two disease syndromes: anorexia and bulemia, as well as to a mostly chimerical diet industry that fleeces Americans of billions of dollars a year.

Despite being socially sanctioned, several of these practices are very dangerous, and it is no coincidence that, to suit the patriarchal sexist ideal, women have borne the brunt of most of them. The choice not to engage in such practices has not been a viable option for most women. Social pressures are too great and economic and emotional independence too unlikely. Instead, these practices are eagerly pursued despite the fact that next to them most forms of piercing seem pretty benign. These practices are not geared to producing a unique self, but an acceptable self, a self that resembles the actors hawking deodorants and the news anchors predigesting the news. In fact, our own cultural uniforms and body-modification practices promote conformity. Given that we clearly engage in practices that do not respect physical or psychic health nor free choice, what can be said about renegade ornament, which is freely chosen and useful to its owner?

One tatooist has written that "The only difference between tatooed people and nontatooed people is that tatooed people don't care if you're not tatooed." This comment underscores what many practitioners of renegade ornament have come to realize, and what many of us realize unconsciously, that renegade ornament is subversive.

Renegade ornament rejects the concept of slavish cultural conformity and either seeks to produce alternate cultures or provides protection from and ammunition against the constraining influence of the ambient culture. In the words of another tatooist, the possession of a forbidden ornament "provides a constant source of irony and distancing." Either the ornament is a personal secret, that can be shared or not, or it is a visible badge of the refusal to conform, and a turning of the tables on society. As writer Dick Hebdige says, "...it translates the fact of being under scrutiny into the pleasure of being watched."

In light of unspoken social constraints, as well as complacency about the role of ornament, piercing demonstrates how jewelry can be a powerful and radical art form. As producers of ornament, we have a special responsibility to understand what ornament means, because we help reinforce its acceptable boundaries. In this context, renegade ornament speaks to the primal need for expression and individuality, even in the conformist consumer culture, and offers the artist unexplored territory for experimentation and expression. Since many piercing sites are usually hidden under clothing, one area for exploration might be to produce jewelry that hints at its existence through clothing. Other areas might include the linking of pierce sites, which leads to increases of scale, and the design of work to maximize sexual and wearing sensation.

As artists, we are often dismissed because of the scale of our work; and we might do well to consider what tatooist Greg Kulz has written [renegade ornament may have] "a more limited audience than a painting in a museum, but [it is] viewed with more care and intimacy."

This is a heady time to address renegade ornament or artistic expression of any kind – the yahoos and know-nothings are on the rise and have effective spokespeople in Washington. We must recognize that battle lines are being drawn and that as artists fence-sitting is not an option.

Senator Jesse Helms, ever-vigilant, has found time to investigate the publishers of a piercing review, and Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, in a chilling statement, has said that in the presence of genital piercing, "you don't need criteria" to judge acceptable art. While this may seem irrelevant to the average metalsmith, it is important to realize that the independent craftsperson and the handmade object pose their own threats and challenges to the mainstream culture.

In rejecting manufacturing and accepting handwork; in seeking to produce the unique rather than the repeated; craftspeople too are renegades. This provocative connection between the users of renegade ornament and us as makers of all manner of ornament requires exploration and attention as we attempt to navigate the pitfalls of the consumer culture.

---

*Keith Lewis is a metalsmith, chemist and Gay / AIDS activist living in Ravenna, Ohio. He thinks that a pierced nipple would do Jesse Helms a world of good.*

This column is derived from a presentation at the Society of North American Goldsmiths conference in San Francisco, March, 1990.

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# John Marshall

John Marshall was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1936. After serving in the Armed Forces and doing construction work, Marshall began his college study in 1958 with one year of business administration. By 1960 his attention had been redirected to silversmithing and design. He studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art between 1960 and 1965 and then went on to teach and pursue graduate work from 1965 to 1967 at the School of Art, Syracuse University, New York. He remained there as an instructor and then as assistant professor until 1970, when he joined the faculty at the University of Washington in Seattle.

The following conversation is taken from a series of interviews, which took place in December 1990 and February 1991, in Seattle and at Marshall's home and studio in Edmonds, Washington, with Patterson Sims, curator of modern art and associate director for art and exhibitions at the Seattle Art Museum.

## A Conversation with Patterson Sims

PS: What personal factors have shaped your professional life?

JM: I started out in a family in which the arts played a very small role. My father supported us as a truck driver. In the Pittsburgh school district, a program was coordinated with the Carnegie Museum of Art to provide small scholarships for high school students to attend Saturday classes at the Museum. I was the student selected to represent my high school and this opportunity, together with my mother's encouragement, inspired me to become an artist. However, I never thought art would become a profession because I enjoyed it too much. After high school, I went into the service to take advantage of the GI Bill and then worked in construction in order to fund my studies. During my first year at Grove City College, while majoring in business administration, I was able to take an elective art class. It was probably the best thing that ever happened to me, because it was there that an art teacher convinced me that I should consider art as a career.

For one year I took evening classes at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh and worked construction jobs during the day in preparation for an art career. Next, it was my good fortune to enroll at the Cleveland Institute of Art and study design with goldsmith John Paul Miller. He taught a sophomore design class and had an intuitive sense for a student's talent. He told me that the way I was doing my work and with my patience I should think about metalwork and holloware. After I finished my first two years at Cleveland, I could have gone into painting, advertising or industrial design. I realized I couldn't be a painter; I love form too much. I enjoy working three dimensionally to make space move and form happen.

*Mokume-Gane Vase*
silver, copper, basalt, 10.5 x 9 x 4"
Collection: Christopher and Alide Latham
Photo: Jerry Davis

At the Institute I tried clay, I tried wood, I tried many materials just to see how I felt about them. It bothered me that a lot of the materials didn't have a sense of being stable. I couldn't get over the fact that glass and ceramics were so fragile: drop them and they're gone. Under the influence of John Paul Miller, I turned to metal. Metal gave me all the things I really enjoyed. I loved to planish, to take all day and hammer out all those marks left by the raising of the silver, all the while thinking about the other pieces I wanted to make. The material met my temperament.

I then enrolled in an evening class in silversmithing and jewelry with the other instructor, Fred Miller (otherwise no relation), and found that it was something that I felt at home with. Fred Miller is a real craftsman, possessed of a dedication that makes him unable to accept anything less than the best. He was a mentor par excellence.

Initially, after graduating from Cleveland, I really wasn't interested in teaching, and I couldn't afford to go to graduate school. I was about to accept a position at General Motors as a model designer when I received a 5th-year scholarship at Cleveland to work toward a BFA, and I was offered a position to teach high school students at a Saturday class. At one of these classes, the wife of Laurence Schmeckebeir (former director of Cleveland, and then dean at Syracuse University) asked me if I would be interested in coming down to talk to her husband. I went down, had an interview with him, Schmeckebeir asked me to join the staff at Syracuse, and I did.

Having only a BFA, I felt somewhat inadequate to head a program, so I really got involved with processes in order to become a better teacher, working both with jewelry and holloware as well as enamels. My first commissions were mostly small jewelry pieces, and I worked up a series of enamels using drawing (basse taille). I went into granulation; worked with gold and enameling; used repetition and variation as I played with form; and I made jewelry, holloware and sculpture. I had a special attraction to juxtaposing materials, techniques and processes at Syracuse. I learned to "draw" by coating copper with a resist and then scratching through to eat away the surface with acid. I'd then carefully lay down an underglaze into those lines and fire clear coats of color on top to retain the drawing. This process is very much like the attitude found in print-making. I developed an ability to shift from functional work to sculpture, to make my functional work more sculptural. At Syracuse I became more involved with explaining and comparing my work both within and outside my field. I was able to receive my MFA while teaching there through my work with Schmeckebeir. He felt that my ability to work the metals was of the caliber to receive the MFA, but my communication skills needed work. He gave me special writing and public speaking assignments, literally throwing me into the very lion's den of public debates and lectures. He arranged for my Master's Show to be at Syracuse House in New York, and this was my second opportunity to benefit from the inspiration of an intuitive teacher.

At the end of five years, our program had moved from temporary quarters in the basement of a dormitory to permanent facilities. And I found that my work grew as well as my awareness of other art. I became both more involved with other attitudes of art and more critical of my own art. I really appreciated the school's support of their art faculty. They took every opportunity to see that I got commissions. The chapel asked me to do a chalice cup/baptismal that would work with all denominations; I came up with a gold chased bowl with a ceramic dish made by a local ceramicist, again mixing techniques and materials. Also, I designed a chancellor's bowl with a ladle and a chancellor's medallion.

PS: Once you got to Washington State your work opened up even more.

JM: I got a great job at the University of Washington. I came there for the professional opportunities. But I was also influenced by the amount of open space – and the beautiful color. The Northwest has definitely affected my work. I became more aware of different types of form because of the severe terrain, and very aware of the subtle and clear colors.

PS: We speak of the Northwest as being an area of the United States that has a strong craft tradition and a strong craft community. Have you found that to be the case?

JM: I already knew of the strong craft tradition because of the National Ceramic shows at the Everson Museum at Syracuse. I was aware of the Seattle-based ceramic artists Howard Kottler, Patti Warashina and Robert Sperry, for example. I find that the craft field has a great deal to offer here. The people have a definite integrity in their work. The relationship that they have with their materials seems to be more natural. With my own work, I find the attitudes of form and space feel more comfortable here than when working back East; my work has grown in scale and risk-taking.

PS: Drawing plays a big role in your work, which makes me think of the Northwest-associated artists Morris Graves and Mark Tobey.

JM: Drawing has played a major part in my work, both in its way of problem solving and communicating to myself as well as to my clients. Without my drawing skills I possibly could not have been able to get the exciting commissions I have had to work on. Many people in the crafts downplay the drawing, feeling that working into the material is where the expression should start. But as I tell my own students, you can experience many more ideas on paper in the time it takes to make one piece in metal. I am influenced by drawings I see in the Northwest, but drawings played an important role back as far as Cleveland where drawing was a major part of the curriculum. At Syracuse, while developing the enameling process, I used drawing. A good example of this is a piece owned by Everson Museum in the permanent collection called "Who Killed Cock Robin?" where I used a drawing of a dead bird. It was a strange thing. I had made a series of pieces about the whole cycle of life. I was working on this piece at about four o'clock in the morning, and I felt a sudden need to have a dead bird to work from. I walked outside and it was kind of scary, at my feet I found a dead bird.

*Flatware*
sterling silver, 7.75 x 1.25 x .75" (fork)
Collection: Mr. and Mrs. Mark Bloome, Jr.
Photo: Paul Macapia

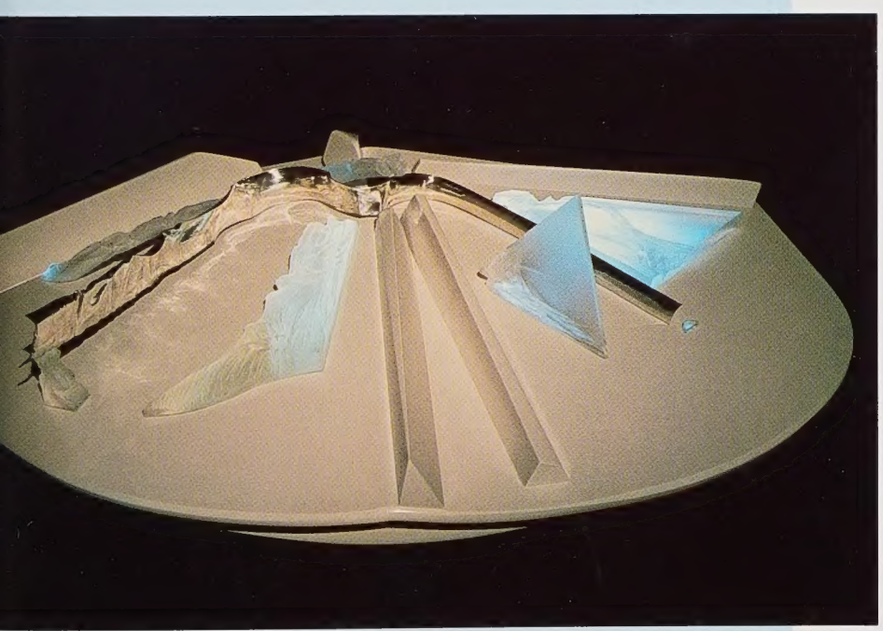
*Thaw*
sterling silver, acrylic,
painted wood base, 21 x 52 x 48"
Lannan Collection
Photo: Steve Young

I constantly relate my drawing and my two-dimensional skill of engraving and chasing to three-dimensional form. I fault people who don't draw. But then I also fault people who can only draw and then make the piece exactly like the drawing. The drawing is a point of departure, but a craftsman should always listen to the metal as he works it. I am fascinated by what can happen to a surface that brings out another aspect of drawing. Lines, whether they're put down with a pencil, a chasing tool or an engraving tool, play with the eye and allow the eye to dart in and out. What's especially nice with metal is that you can engrave a line into a piece of metal and then light makes it. Line moves across a contour and complements the line on the form. At times I think that when physically I can no longer work with the tools of the silversmith, I will be able to express myself by drawing.

Another reason why drawing is important for the student and the beginning craftsman is that it is one of the best means to get commissions. When you first start out, people just don't come up to you and say I'd like you to do a coffee set. You have to show drawings and use your sketches to let people know what you'll be making for them. You have to commence with drawings that communicate what you will be doing. Plus drawing is the greatest way for you to solve problems for yourself. You can go through many ideas and throw them away or select some over others – this is all part of the drawing process.

PS: Commissions play a central role in your art; can you talk about the process of commissions and discuss a few specific people and projects?

JM: I made a decision when I was at Syracuse that I would not take commissions where I would have to compromise my identity. However, I have been fortunate in that in most cases, I'm really excited about commissions, and I'll really try to do the best job I can to please clients. I found I must have commissions in order to support a family – let's be honest, teaching is not the most lucrative means to buy tools, build a studio and support a family. I have had great commissions and have met beautiful people in the process. What you're looking for is a client with an understanding of the arts, someone who doesn't ask about what the piece is going to be worth in 10 years. In most cases, I am not too excited about getting involved with a gallery, because a gallery separates me from the client. What I really enjoy about commissions are the people. Commissions come about either because of a show where I'll make a contact with someone or when someone sees my work at someone else's home; one person leads to another.



PS: Can you be specific about some of the people you have worked with and some of the projects you've done for them?

JM: For instance I've made many silver bowls for a range of clients from the Seattle art collector Anne Gould Hauberg – who has commissioned several pieces over the years – to a memorial to honor the Airborne Rangers of the Korean War. The bowl I made for the Rangers has a 36-inch disk, which is engraved with all their campaigns and names, and sits on a polished basalt stone. For another Seattle collector, Dr. Darryl Rogers, who wanted a sculptural, but functional, coffee set, I made a stacking coffee/tea set. The teapot is on the bottom; the sugar bowl comes next. The coffee pot next and then at the very top is the pouring sugar bowl. The lids drop right into the sugar bowl. I incorporated the Northwest terrain by using chasing to engrave the landscape. I always try to merge the sculptural and the functional to get double use. Another commission was a six-gallon punch bowl and 36 cups to go with it for Charles Mayer, a collector in Sandusky, Ohio for whom I've done a number of pieces.

PS: And when you have a project with 36 cups, do you have any assistants?

JM: Every once in a while I've hired people, but I don't have them work in my studio. For the cups, I actually had three of my graduate students help. They just raised them and then I did all the chasing and the repoussé. For the basalt stone, I have a friend that works with stone and I give him a very carefully scaled and detailed drawing. He works up the stone first and then I work the silver to fit that stone. If I feel that the stone is not working, I'll take it back to him and we'll make little adjustments.

Another interesting Seattle commission was done for Mark Bloome. I worked up a set of candleholders that functioned both on the table and as sconces. After I finished that commission he asked me if I was interested in flatware. I wasn't sure that I wanted to get caught up in something that would take up a lot to time and duplication. But I said the only way that I might consider it would be to do eight different place settings. All the bowls and the fork tines and blades are the same, but the handles are all different. It's not the usual set of knives, forks and spoons. They actually play with the settings, all the pieces are positioned on one side or maybe the knife will be above the plate. They have a series of sketches of all the different ways in which they have laid out the silver.

I have also done projects for public buildings, especially churches here in the Seattle area. I did a chalice in copper and silver for a church in Bellevue. The bowl can be taken out and used separately or placed into the holder and held by the base. Initially, a church in Ballard just wanted me to do a cross. It is about 11-feet high and made of teak with a metal crown of thorns that floats in front of the crossmember. It is supported from stainless steel wires and the congregation walks beneath it. But as I was underway, they got me involved with the rest of the church. I ended up designing their altar, the candleholders and the baptismal bowl. I have also worked for the Edmonds Methodist Church designing pieces for their chapel and main sanctuary. The piece in the main sanctuary was in memory of two sons who died at different times. I designed a piece using anodized titanium abstractly where the forms are separated at the base by an arch representing the church, and they come together at the top symbolizing their coming together again in death. I find myself working more conceptually now in my pieces and being less involved with the craft, feeling confident that my hands will perform as a craftsman.

But my most remarkable patron came into my life when I displayed my work in the faculty exhibition at the Henry Art Gallery of the University of Washington in 1979. The great collector Patrick Lannan was in Seattle to look at glass, came to the show, saw a piece there and purchased it. Lannan was also interested in a large punch bowl that was in the show that I could not sell because it was for another client. He responded by commissioning me to do another, even larger punch bowl. Because of its scale, I employed hydraulics to push the form out and then went back into it with chasing and repoussé to give the details. The first time we sat down, he said he enjoyed my work and wanted to buy it. He asked if there was any room for negotiation? And I said no. From then on, we never talked about money once I set a price. Patrick then said he'd like me to do something that would be more sculptural and asked me what I wanted to do. I described a design for three related pieces; I laid out just what I wanted to do, how long I needed, etc. I was paid by the month. I was building a studio then, and it was just the right thing all around. When he asked how long I wanted to work on the pieces, I said, "About two years." And he said, "What scale?" to which I replied, "Something around six feet." Patrick arranged for the silver to be sent to my home. The finished pieces were shipped to his place in West Palm Beach, Florida. Eventually, he designated a Marshall Room in his residence.

At the same time that I was preparing for the Lannan commission, I was invited to give a lecture and workshop in Alaska. I was very impressed by the glacier and its effect on the space. This became my concept for the first three pieces I did for Lannan. The first piece, called *Glacier*, uses copper to represent the cooling of the earth; the silver represents the actual ice over the earth and the light from below showing through acrylic represents the freeze. The second piece, *Freeze*, depicts a total freeze from ice to chill to ice and uses chasing and repoussé work on the sheet with the wood base. The third piece, *Thaw* shows the thaw, and the meltdown of the ice. Patrick's commission allowed me to consider the idea of working silver in six-foot sheets, which was almost unheard of at that time. He then invited me to work for another two years during which time I completed two other sculptures: *Aurora* and *Landscape*. On the Lannan pieces I would spend a whole day on a little area that might be only 5 inches by 5 inches, just producing patterns with a surface that was 5 feet long. While I was working on these pieces, Lannan would sometimes fly out and we would have an opportunity to talk about the work in progress. He died prior to the completion of *Landscape*, which I titled in his memory. After completing *Landscape*, I visited his home and for the first time saw all of the pieces displayed together in the Marshall Room. Lannan was very direct and strong-willed in both his manner and conversation; every artist should be so fortunate as to have this kind of experience with a client.

PS: You went back to making functional pieces after the sculpture you created for Lannan. Will you always have a dichotomy in your work between the functional and the sculptural? Or will you conclude that you want to be a sculptor, and not take any more functional commissions?

JM: Basically I am a worker. I was given a talent and I enjoy using it. I enjoy meeting the challenge of function, whereas too many craftspersons are not being true to the material or to themselves. Function is an integral part of each service piece I do – all parts must work within the design and not in conflict with the sculptural movements. A teapot that does not pour correctly compromises the sculptural intent of the design. In too many cases, where the craftsman or the artist has attempted to give a sculptural attitude to functional pieces, the sculptural part makes it function less effectively. But also, behind it all, is the sculptor who wants to get out.

PS: When I look at your work, I'm more impressed by the functional pieces than I am by the sculptural pieces. Your sculptural pieces seem to be too frozen by conventions of the 1950s and 60s, whereas your functional pieces seem to be able to transcend tradition. Is that because you've devoted so much more of your energy to functional pieces? Or, in making a differentiation between these two aspects of your work, would it be possible to say that your functional work is better?

JM: I think my functional work is better; after all, this is where the majority of my time has been placed. I've solved many problems of functional work and added something to that field. Sculpture, though, I find is a must, so I can express myself and fantasize or just spontaneously find new forms.

PS: Who has influenced you and your work the most, the artists who work with functions or the sculptors?

JM: I have a very hard time isolating specific people who have influenced me. It could be someone who makes functional works or a sculptor. Among my colleagues in Seattle, I admire the ceramic sculptors Robert Sperry, Howard Kottler (sadly no longer alive) and Patti Warashina. In Patti's work, for instance, I like the way she draws on her surface, you read a two-dimensional surface on a three-dimensional form.

I really enjoy Alexander Calder's sense of line, how he makes form out of a very flat pattern. As you walk around his pieces, you lose the third dimension because they are made of flat sheets of metal. Calder moved back and forth easily from being a maker of useful objects and sculptures. Above all, I find myself very drawn to Henry Moore's work. His forms engage an energy that actually seems to grow from the inside out. I admire his sense of surface and texture.

Two people who have influenced me are John Paul Miller, who taught my eyes to see and Fred Miller, who made me aware of what my hands can do, and, at the present time, my colleague, Mary Hu, who produces form through lines of wire. I am also influenced by the forms of Henning Koppel – his quiet functional form. I admire Claus Bury for the exciting dimension found in his pieces and his ability to change the scale of his work, and Al Paley for his aggressive, linear composition.

PS: Finally, if you were to define yourself briefly, would you say you were a metalsmith, a sculptor, a maker of functional works or a craftsman?

JM: The whole idea of answering that question irritates me, because I don't know. You are asking me to commit myself; I don't want to. At this point, I want to be left alone. It's taken me a long time to establish this intelligence, skill and talent. I have had an opportunity to do something here, and whether you like it or whether it goes into a history book, I could care less. I want to work. Every time I come into my studio, I realize what I don't know. The more you learn, the more critical you become, the more precious time becomes. I've got to make the best use of every moment. For someone to ask me whether I want to be a sculptor, jeweler, or metalsmith is, at this point, foolish. I think I have enough of a reputation that I can do what the hell I want to do. I've proven that I am a craftsman, I've proven that I can be a sculptor and I've proven that I can deal with color and line.

PS: In terms of influence, do you try to travel out of Seattle and see other people's work?

JM: Yes, I feel that it's very important for artists to expose themselves to other art. It's necessary that I get to places like New York at least every few months for a three- or four-day visit. The first time I experienced New York, I said to myself, I have to do this as many times as I can. To go through the Museum of Modern Art and see a sculpture by Lipschitz or a painting by Picasso is crucial to my growth as an artist.

PS: Just as you look back to others for ideas and inspiration, you have developed a major reputation as a teacher. What are your feelings about teaching and your students themselves?

JM: Teaching means a lot to me. Many professors often say they wish they could retire, constantly talk about how the students drain their time and take them away from their work. They should quit, because they're probably not good for the student either. I must say that the teachers that made all the difference to me in my growth as an artist were also very active in their art. It is a very hard role to play, breaking yourself away from your work and getting involved in someone else's thoughts. But I enjoy the students because they're always challenging me and keeping me sharp. I'll never forget the first time I got a leave. (I went through the whole time at Syracuse without a leave.) It was in Seattle when I took my first quarter off, full pay, took myself and squirreled away, and I didn't like it so much. Don't get me wrong; through every leave I have taken, my work has become stronger, which has made me a stronger teacher. But it's a narrow line between my time and the students' time. I have a reputation of being kind of a bear if people interrupt me. I have laid out my life carefully and my family's been very tolerant of me. If I don't get that time, I'm miserable and everyone around me is miserable because I'm miserable. I have certain days that I work in my studio. But when I go to teach, I tell my students, I'm yours. I will crawl through your ideas to find out how I can help you. I don't want to make a little Marshall out of you, but it is my mission to help you understand who you are. Identity is the big thing. To mold a person properly is another creative attempt. They do their thing, you come over there and throw a couple of words at them or be a sounding board. That's all you need to do for some. For others, you have to physically nurture them by taking the pencil or hammer from their hand and demonstrate. Also, you must support them by feeding them, processing information and making the space they work in more effective. And to others you need to say, hey, this isn't for you.

PS: If you could bring any living artist to talk to your students at the University of Washington, who would it be?

JM: I would like to have Claus Bury come to talk with my students and give insight into his work. He is a person who works geometric illusions in his small jewelry pieces as well as site-specific work in large scale. He has a tremendous sense of color as well as form and does a find job of marrying the two. He also uses drawing in his work to prepare and explore.

PS: In recent years, the world has been fascinated by the idea of a MacArthur Grant, a grant that for five years gives it recipient sufficient income to pursue what he or she wants to. If such a thing happened to you, what would you do?

JM: I've thought about it and actually know someone who received one. To be able to work solely as an artist for five uninterrupted years seems unbelievably exhilarating. I would take silver through a whole series of functional pieces – coffee sets, trays, candleholders – expressed in almost a sculptural way, and then progress through these pieces to establish a sense of what that metal can do in esthetic terms, creating tabletop and floor pieces. It would be a tremendous opportunity, especially at this time when my hand and head feel like one.

PS: Do you sometimes get frustrated by how obdurate a material silver is?

JM: Metal has a quality to it that you can build upon, you can have a lot of time with it or work very spontaneously. I've done some pieces I've been satisfied with in 15 minutes and others that have taken six months. Silver is just fluid enough and just rigid enough for me. Silver has an identity that is very friendly to everything around it, it brings everything into it, the reflections of color go in and come back to you.

Also, it's a precious material that is economically accessible again. When I was working on the Lannan pieces, silver rose to $30-40 an ounce; people would come into my studio and all they could talk about was how much such a large amount of silver cost. It was slightly inhibiting when I was engraving or cutting into the silver. But now, it's great because my students can work with silver long before I could have done so as a student. Please remember that when I say that silver is my medium, I am also referring to all those other materials that I've put into a relationship with the silver: titanium, basalt, acrylic, gold and a few others.

PS: Do you have anything you would like to say directly to metalsmiths that we haven't covered?

JM: The one thing that is needed right now in our field is communication. I think we're doing a very shallow job of this, because when I read articles I'm reading the same thing. The whole idea of technique is overplayed. We had a whole period when all people wanted to talk about was what granulation or reticulation or mokume-gane was and how it was accomplished.

We are underrating ourselves when we talk metalsmith-to-metalsmith all the time. Within art history programs, how much is said about metal? Most people don't know about it, and when they do, it's usually just about technique. I think that people need to know more about why artists do what they do and what they are trying to say. For example, I like to hear from artists like Richard Mawdsley, Helen Shirk, Chunghi Choo, Heikki Seppä, Brent Kingston, Stanley Lechtzin, Bob Ebendorf...what are they actually doing and why.

PS: You make the field sound like it is in crisis.

JM: The silver field is really struggling today. The industry in England and the United States is very traditional, producing the same patterns over and over again. The industry is not really keeping up. They continue to push those yellow designs, when they could be making an art form for the table that would keep up with the exciting things that are happening in architecture as well as interiors.

In the United States we have taken metal further than anywhere else. The Scandinavians are very clean and functional with their design. The English are tremendous craftsmen, particularly with their floral decorative things. Germans are making pieces that say things with a cold machinelike form. But Americans are taking metal more into an art form than anyone else.

PS: Do you also have dreams and aspirations for the material?

JM: Yes, I'd really like to see metal make a statement like canvas does. It could do a better job because we don't have to build an illusion. Color and alloying are making a big difference. Silver can move off the table and be more of an esthetic statement.

PS: Because silver is what we call a precious material, people often ignore the esthetic choices that have gone into making it, marvel at the craft of its production and either make functional use of it or only respond to the luxurious appeal of the finished product. They deal with it in a much more summary fashion than they might works of art made in less intrinsically interesting materials. So much metal is made for its pure decorative value and ostentatious adornment that it's difficult to acknowledge its complex web of spiritual, emotional and esthetic ideas.

JM: At this stage, I see the material of silver differently. I'm just beginning to use it to play with the idea of how reflect into the world and how the world reflects into us and into my pieces. The reflections that fall upon silver and the other materials I use produce spheres of illumination. This ongoing circular motion invites you in. It's a path. Now if I used a material that wasn't silver or I used a bigger scale, if I was a "sculptor" not a "metalsmith," you would be asking me what that line and path is. In some of my new pieces I see two people who are inside working their way to the outside, enveloped by the whole sense of the world. Metal allows you to imagine what you want to see in it because of its reflection and luminosity. Light dematerializes pieces and simultaneously substantiates them.

My feelings toward this metal, when I think about it, have not changed much. Just when I feel a complete understanding of it within my grasp, I find something new that makes me wonder if it's still just the beginning. It's exciting and I still feel the challenge.

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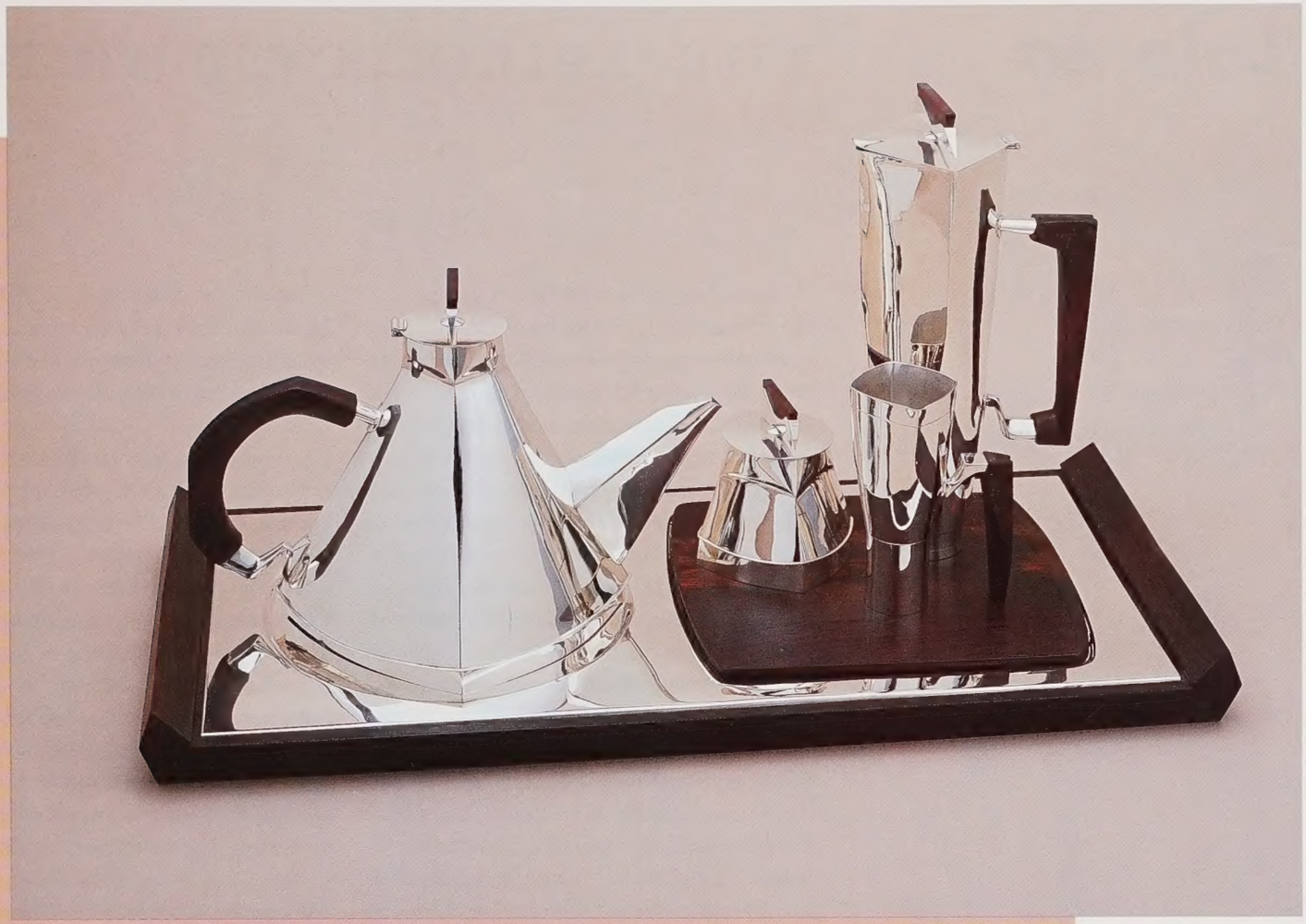
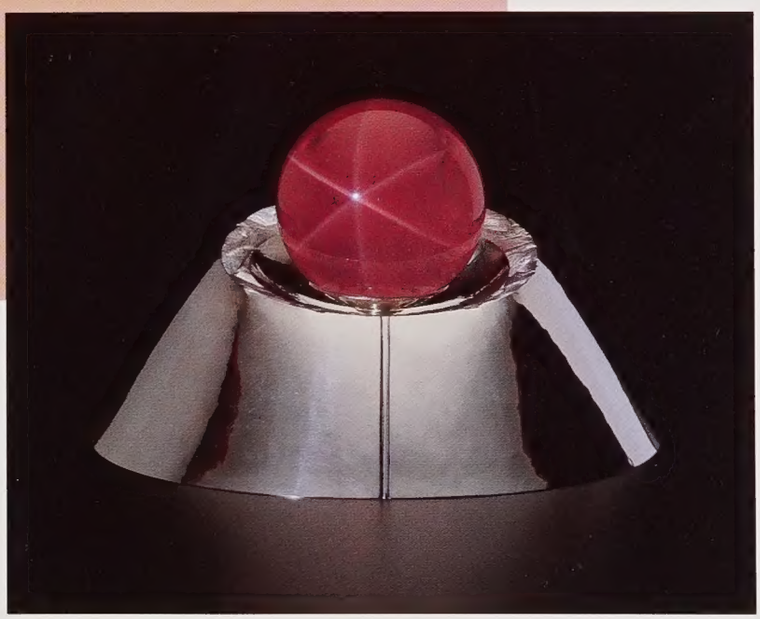
**John Marshall's work will be the subject of a retrospective exhibition at the National Ornamental Metal Museum in Memphis from September 15 to November 10, 1991. The exhibition will be accompanied by a 12-page, full-color catalog with 27 images, available from the museum, 374 West California St., Memphis, TN 38106 for $6.50, including postage.**



*Coffee and Tea Service*
sterling silver, rosewood, 2.25 x 26.25 x 14"
Collection: Anne Gould Hauberg
Photo: Paul Macapia

*Chalice*
silver, quartz crystal, hematite, 15.5 x 7.5 x 7"
Photo: Jerry Davis



*Star Rose Quartz Sphere*
sterling silver, quartz, 6 x 10 x 9.5"
Collection: White Rose Foundation
Photo: Jerry Davis

# Loloma

## THE SPIRIT OF THE NEW

**by**
**Phil London**
**and**
**Anita London**

On January 7, 1921, a son was born to Rex of the Sand and Tobacco Clan and Rachael Loloma of the Badger Clan, Hotevilla, Arizona. Rex was an accomplished weaver and respected moccasin maker; Rachael, an excellent basket maker. The family lived in the most traditional Hopi village. Over the years they were able to instill in their son Charles a sense of design, dedication and perfection in the Hopi way – art is not different than daily life. While it is not surprising that Charles Loloma became one of the outstanding American Indian jewelers of our time, the road he followed was uncharted and the resulting work unique. A man of two worlds, he spent time with Oleg Cassini, Marcel Marceau and other international notables, as well as being a member of the Snake Society: he participated in traditional ceremonial life and performed as a clown kachina.

Charles attended day school in the Village of Hotevilla, where his talent was soon recognized by his teachers. Although there were no formal art classes, he was encouraged to draw and paint. He studied art under Fred Kabotie at the Hopi High School in Oraibi, and during this time he was painting murals. He transferred to the Phoenix Indian School and studied with Lloyd Kiva New, and then went on to summer school in Fort Sill, Oklahoma, where he studied under Olaf Nordmark, a muralist.

In 1939 he received his first major commission, murals for the federal building on Treasure Island in San Fransisco Bay as part of the Golden Gate International Exposition. In 1940 he assisted Fred Kabotie in painting reproductions of the Awatovi murals at the Haskell Institute, Kansas, which were eventually moved to New York to be included in "Indian Art of the United States," an exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in 1941. These murals are now on display at the art museum in Denver.

Charles finished high school in 1941, and, by that time, he was an accomplished artist, receiving many commissions. He had also illustrated Edward Kennard's book, *Hopihoya.*

Like many others, in 1941 Loloma was drafted into the army, a first for American Indians. He was a camouflage expert in Missouri, then spent years in the Aleutians as an engineer. In 1942 he married Otellie Pasivaya and, after being discharged in 1945, they returned to her village of Shipaulovi on Second Mesa. With the help of the GI Bill, Charles and Otellie attended the School for American Craftsmen at Alfred University in New York, where he studied design, mechanical drawing, ceramic chemistry and marketing. The university was known for its ceramic program. For Charles, a Hopi, it was unusual to study ceramics, as ceramic art was traditionally a women's craft.

Loloma applied for a Whitney Foundation Fellowship to study the clays of the Hopi area. In 1949, while still at Alfred, he proved through his experiments what he thought to be true, that the shale clays would turn to glaze if fired at high temperatures. During his stay at Alfred he also discovered that he wanted to pursue a career as an artist, which previously he had not considered to be a plausible occupation, even though he had been successful in selling his ceramic ware. After completing his two-year Whitney Foundation Fellowship, he and his wife set up a shop in the Kiva Craft Center in Scottsdale, Arizona. After several years he says he simply decided to make jewelry, perhaps because in pottery, once started, had to be completed, while in jewelry he could set a piece aside to work on another and then return to the first piece; it was more manageable.

# IN | HOPI | JEWELRY

By the time Charles reached age 40, he was well acquainted with many different media. He was self-taught in silversmithing, with the help of John Adair's book, *The Navajo and Pueblo Silversmiths.* His early pieces were cast and designed in typical Hopi fashion – he still wears one of his first ring designs, a badger paw cast in gold – but his creative talent soon carried him be-yond conventional Indian jewelry. After some time, he began to take advantage of unexpected imperfections and to incorporate these into his designs. His painting background enabled him to take various colored stones and blend them together with exceedingly pleasing results. Early in his career as a jeweler, lacking financial aid, the asked his customers to bring him their old jewelry and let him redesign it.

In 1956 he and his wife were running a pottery shop and teaching part-time at Arizona State College, as well as in Sedona during the summer months. This gave him the opportunity both to formulate his ideas on design and to gather experience at selling. Loloma and his wife were two of the first Indians to run a successful pottery shop, and as a result received a great deal of publicity, which of course helped their business.

Loloma feels that good salesmanship, learning to talk to people is a very important factor and he has worked hard to overcome his shyness. His experience in classroom teaching also helped him become a spokesman for contemporary American Indian artists. During the 1950s and 1960s he helped break down barriers that had kept Indian artists and Indian art from mainstream art. Early on, his work was rejected from the Gallup Ceremonial Exhibits as not being Indian. But by the 60s this began to change, and Loloma and a few others were accepted as legitimate. Loloma was the pioneer in jewelry. In 1962 the Institute of American Indian Arts was founded, and Loloma was hired and appointed head of the plastic arts and sales departments In 1963 he traveled to Paris with letters of introduction to the fashion world. During his stay in Paris, his jewelry was modeled in fashion shows and private solo exhibitions. For him, this trip helped define some new designs. After he left Paris, he returned to the Institute in Santa Fe, where he remained until 1965 when he returned to his village in Hotevilla. Shortly thereafter, he divorced his first wife, remarried and built a studio and home. At this time his jewelry was winning first prizes in Indian art shows and being exhibited internationally. By the 1970s, the Queen of Denmark and wife of Philippine president Marcos had received gifts of his jewelry from President Johnson. He wanted to know what it felt like to own an airplane, to drive expensive cars, to wear a tuxedo, to eat at the 21 Club in New York – the night he did eat there he showed up tieless; of course, the necklace he had on was worth thousands of dollars but they gave him a dollar tie to put on. In 1972 Loloma was featured in the NET film *Three Indians,* as well as in the PBS film *Loloma.* He was also appointed to the Arizona commission on the arts and named "Arizona's Living Indian Treasure."

**LIZARD PIN**
silver, turquoise

**BRACELET**
pink and red coral, turquoise
and other stones
including fossilized ivory
Photo: Jerry Jacka

**A recent conversation with Charles's wife Georgia helped clarify some of the personal aspects of his approach to Hopi jewelry design.**

*Can you explain the difference between the Hopi overlay and Charles's style?*

Charles started constructing pieces and also did lost wax casting. For many years most Hopi jewelers were doing the overlay using traditional patterns and pottery design. Charles was an innovator; he was never locked into one interpretation.

*Does his jewelry represent any particular Indian lore?*

I think that with the Hopi Indian and probably with most Indians, that their artwork is not separate from their whole belief system, and that you will see the influences of the music, of the ceremony, of their whole way of life somehow reflected in the artwork itself. Everything that they do is integrated, it's all one pattern. There's not a separateness. You don't go off to do art – you are art.

*The ring you are wearing is unusual in that there are hidden stones; does this have any significance?*

Yes. It has been a very important contribution. Charles calls these "inner gems" and they represent the collective personal beauty, the value system, the choices that we make as individuals about who we become, that is your inner beauty, it's your inner gems.

*Being a jeweler myself, I've always been taught that the back of something, or the inside, should be as beautiful as the front. Obviously, Charles has carried this a step further, indicating an inner soul light.*

It's very popular with rings, especially wedding rings, because people feel not only that they have that inner beauty, the lining of the ring, but, if they had matching rings, or they attached significance to the stones that were used there, that they had an inner covenant that was not seen by the outside world.

*I see in some of his work he uses gold as well as silver. Does this have any significance? Because I think, truthfully, Hopi jewelry is primarily silver.*

The Hopi's background in jewelry wasn't very extensive as in some cultures, but they started by using Hopi overlay: they used silver primarily. I read an article once that said that in Hopi jewelry there's the Hopi overlay and then there's Charles Loloma. Those two things. Charles started out in silver; it was a matter of economic necessity. And as he began to be able to work with gold, he started incorporating gold. He also had an attitude that if he was making a silver bracelet, and the stone needed the warmth of gold, he would put a gold bezel around the stone. It would simply warm up that whole piece. He also felt that there was no problem incorporating both the silver and gold at the same time, and he was able to pull that off successfully.

*Is there anything else you would like to add?*

Only that as a result of an automobile accident in 1986 the studio is closed and Charles is no longer producing any jewelry.

*Phil and Anita London are jewelry collectors, lecturers and writers. Phil is a jeweler and founder of the Pennsylvania Society of Goldsmiths and the Florida Society of Goldsmiths.*

# Claire Falkenstein's Never-Ending Universe

by Toni Lesser Wolf

Claire Falkenstein is a master of linear metal sculpture. Hers is not an art of solid form, as relating to space and mass, but of a cursive gesture – a scribble in the air.[1] It is essentially a public or display art and is directed not to the private sensibility but to the collective unconscious.[2] Falkenstein has invariably identified herself with her drawings; the linear emphasis in her work can readily be seen in her architectural commissions, as well as in her jewelry. "She sees metal as an extruded material – not as a solid mass. She creates the volume necessary for the sculpture by linear definition. She is obsessed by movement rather than mass, by rhythm rather than repose."[3]

**1 *Grotto Gates*, wrought iron, glass insets, 4 x 7 x .040 meters, 1957. Princess Pignatelli's Villa, Santa Marinella, Italy**

During the 1950s, Falkenstein's sculpture succeeded in interpreting the Abstract Expressionism of painters such as Jackson Pollock, Sam Francis and Clyfford Still. Her contribution to metalwork is all the more impressive due to the difficulty of expressing the complete freedom of action painting in a reluctant medium. Hammered metal does not naturally lend itself to the same spontaneity as painting, yet Falkenstein has managed to evoke a dynamic abstraction in her sculpture and jewelry. She was regarded by Michel Tapie (an important midcentury art critic) as the quintessential exponent of "art autre" – that form of expression that came to life after both the classicism of Cubism and the outrageousness of Dada dwindled and faded from the art scene.

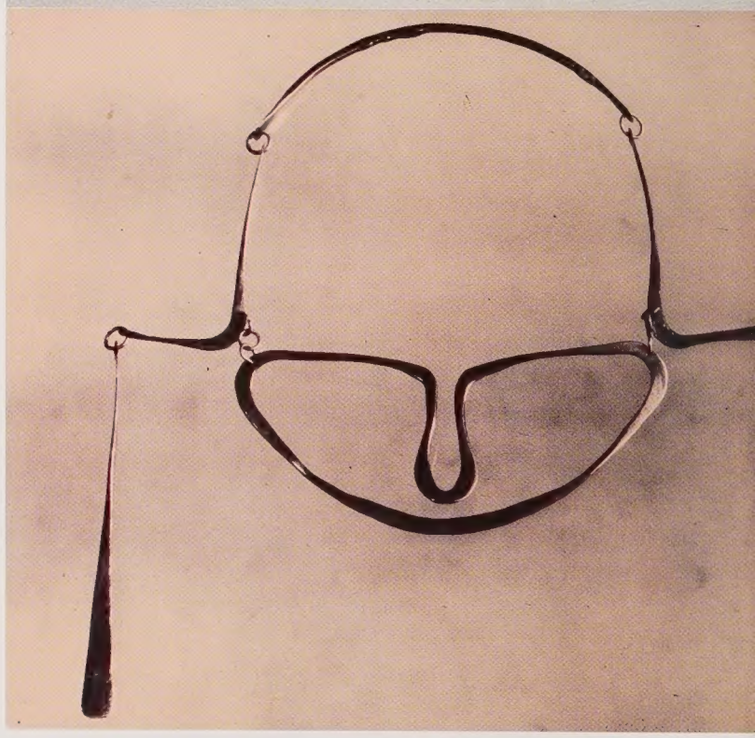
Falkenstein's artistic aim was to create forms that gave substance to the mysteries of the universe. To this end, she used a personal vocabulary of symbols, as metaphors for the teachings of Pythagorean mathematics and modern science, especially Einsteinian physics. Her three most significant motifs are the "moving point," which alludes to Einstein's theory of relativity, "interstices," which emphasize the spaces contained by matter, and the "never-ending screen," which symbolizes infinity – the ever-expanding universe. This last sign is the most important in that it represents the most crucial element of her forms, *continuity*, the concept that forms one of the bases of present-day topology and by which the entire perception of spatial/formal relationships has been challenged.[4] Falkenstein has explored these themes in monumental, as well as small, sculptures and jewelry.

Claire Falkenstein has born in Coos Bay, Oregon on July 22, 1908. She graduated from the University of California at Berkeley in 1930. In 1934, she received a grant to study with Alexander Archipenko at Mills College in Oakland, California. When I asked her to comment on the influence, if any, that the great Russian sculptor might have had on her work, she said that he hated anyone to copy him, although she did acknowledge his effect on her oeuvre, unconsciously, if not consciously. For example, there exists a definite formal connection between the general angularity and fanlike protrusions in a silver necklace of Falkenstein's from the 1950s and Archipenko's polychromed bronze sculpture, *Woman With Fan* from 1914. Falkenstein admits to being inspired by Brancusi, especially *Bird in Space*, which seeks to materialize the concept of flight, continuity and infinity. Brancusi, of course, achieved this through a sleek gesture in shiny bronze, while Falkenstein's endless screens express their organic repetitiveness with convoluted wire.

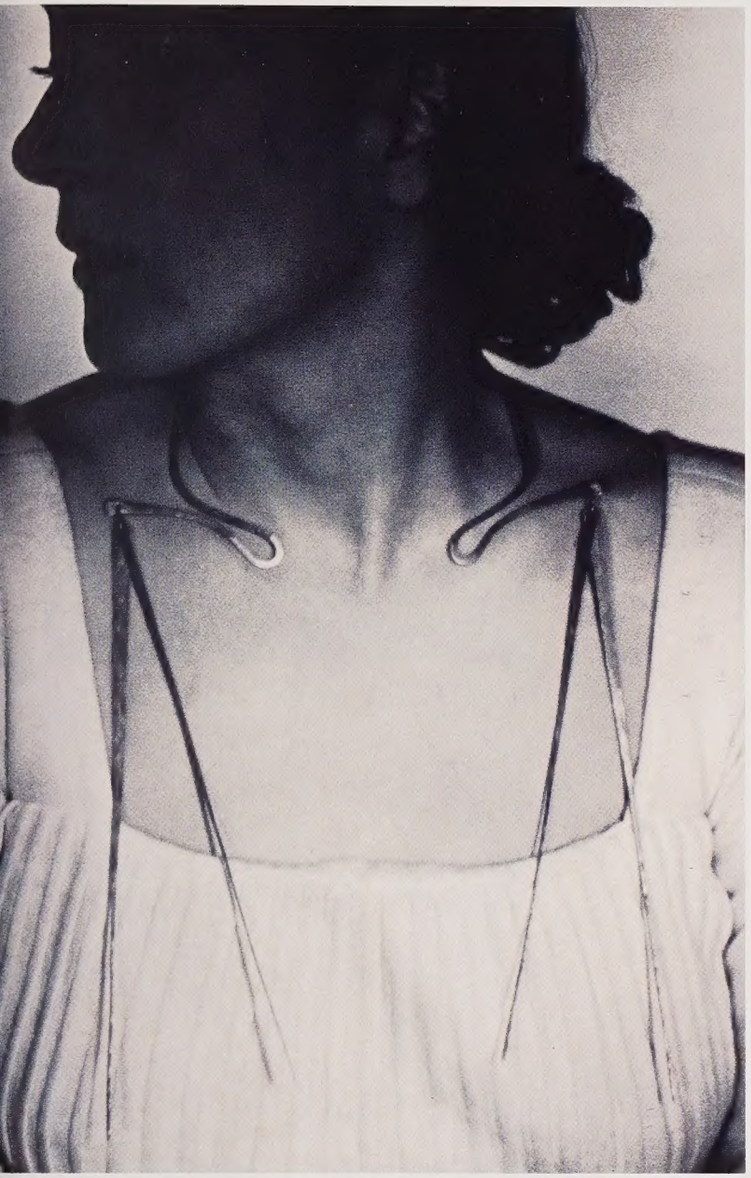
Falkenstein worked in San Francisco until 1950 when she moved to Paris. From 1940 to 1950, she exhibited in America, mostly at the San Francisco Museum of Art and Gallery Meyer in New York, and several times in Paris. In 1950, after she moved to Paris, she often collaborated with architects and engineers. Her first great commission was in 1954 – the stair screen for Galleria Spazio in Rome. It was constructed from mild steel and fused glass, a collaboration with architect Luigi Moretti. This was followed by the grotto gates for the villa of Princess Pignatelli, also near Rome and with Moretti, in 1957 (Figure 1). These gates, too, were forged from mild steel with Venetian glass inclusions. Their inspiration stemmed from her admiration for Antonio Gaudi, whose biomorphism is reflected in Falkenstein's necklace from 1951, as well (Figure 2). The exuberantly organic undulations of the Pignatelli gates recall various natural forms – spider webs, vines or bared tree branches.[5] The genesis for this and other never-ending screens may also be seen in Falkenstein's own wire drawings from the 1950s, in which the exploration of negative space is paramount. This emphasis on the void is well illustrated in the interstices between the bits of twisted wire in the monumental gates (1961) done for Peggy Guggenheim's palace in Venice, as well.

Claire Falkenstein made her first piece of jewelry around 1944 or 45 on the occasion of her winning an international award for wallpaper design given by the Association of Interior Design. She decided to wear a knitted, turbanlike hat to the award ceremony and desired an ornament for it. To that end, she forged a three-dimensional brooch incorporating two circular shapes and measuring about five inches long. However, Falkenstein is adamant about her her belief that jewelry is "not bijoux" – not purely decorative in intent – but related, conceptually, as well as visually, to her sculpture. "Jewelry [making] is the best schooling I ever had," she told me. "[One] can make mistakes, experiment in structure, design and relationship to the human body."[6] This view-point is consistent with sculptor Ibram Lassaw's belief that jewelry serves as a maquette for the metal sculptor. It is a method of sketching the large pieces in a nonpressured, playful fashion, to work through ideas.

**2** ***Necklace*, cast bronze, 1951. Collection: Smith College, MA**



**3** ***Face Necklace*, gold, 1956**



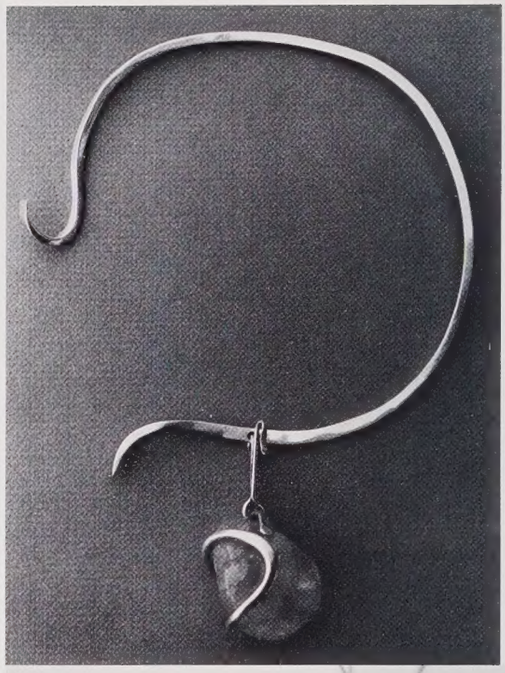
**4 *Pantheon Column Necklace*, silver, 1955**

In 1948, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis held the first in a series of traveling exhibition/sales, entitled "Jewelry for Under $50," in which Falkenstein participated. She was also represented in a similar exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in October 1955. Falkenstein concentrated on jewelry when she moved to Paris in 1950, until about 1952, partly because she didn't have much space or money to buy materials for sculpture. She worked in iron, brass, cement and cast plastic resin. It was also the period when she first began welding, using cheap stove wire to create complex baroque structures that enclosed individual spatial modules, because it was all she could afford. Edgar Kaufman, Jr., then director of the design department at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, saw Falkenstein's jewelry in Paris, about 1953, and soon after bought two pieces from Betty Parsons (her New York dealer) for MoMA's permanent collection. The jewelry was shown in MoMA's "Art for Use" traveling exhibition. During that period, Falkenstein's jewelry was also shown at the Werkbund in Berlin (1952), the Institute of Contemporary Art in London (1953), Galleria Montenapoleone in Milan (1954) and Galleria Spazio in Rome (1954, 55 and 59).

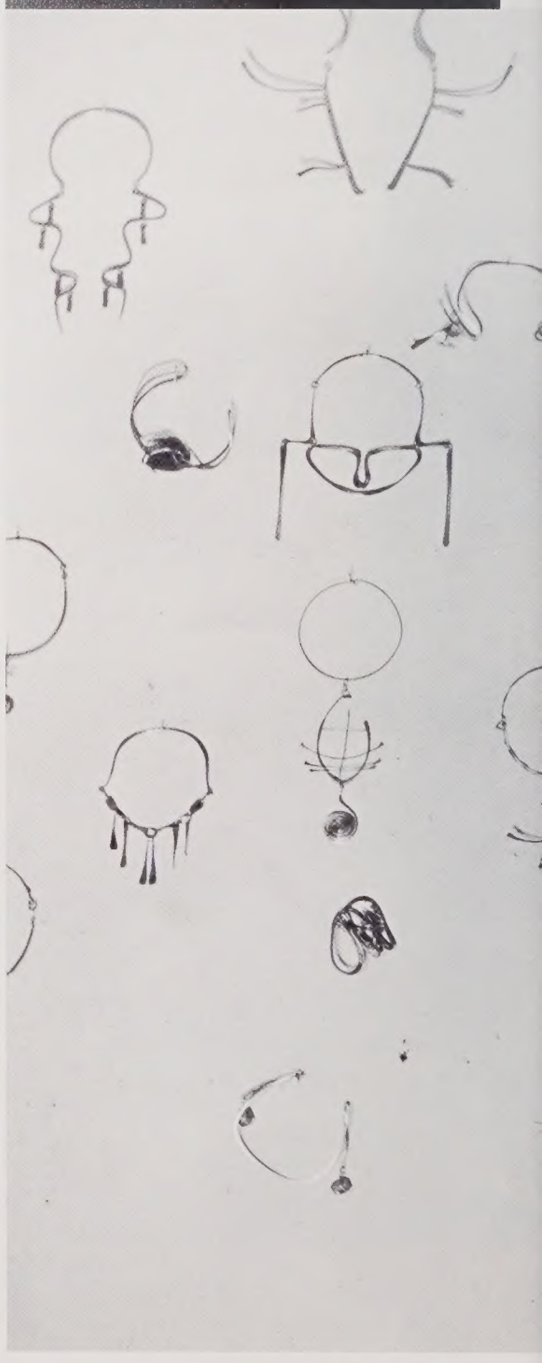
Falkenstein made "conventional" necklaces that fully encircle the neck (Figure 3), those that hang around the back of the neck and remain open in front (Figure 4) and C-shaped pieces that hang asymmetrically (Figure 5). One of her greatest contributions to midcentury jewelry design was to open the side of the necklace, which she did for the first time in 1952. The significance of this innovation lies in the effect of allowing the curve of the neck to continue in one uninterrupted sweep, rather than creating a delineation between the shoulders and face as traditional necklaces do. The design also illustrates Falkenstein's application of her principles of continuity, as the organic forms of her jewelry posit the human being as integrated with nature.[7] Swedish jeweler, Torun Bulow-Hübe explored a similar asymmetrical concept in the early 1950s, while American, Art Smith (*Metalsmith*, Fall 1987) forged C-shaped necklaces, as well, 1953.

Although Falkenstein disavows any conscious connection with other contemporaneous sculptors or jewelers, she is a product of her era and shares a comparable esthetic with other artists and designers working in the 1940s and 50s. The most obvious comparison is with the jewelry of Alexander Calder. Falkenstein considers Calder's jewelry more formalized, hers freer.[8] But the contrast doesn't end there. One of the most salient features of Calder's jewelry was his handling of the metal medium and its particular processes. His jewelry was primarily concerned with technique, while Falkenstein's aim was to depict the same signs and symbols used in her sculptures and environmental works. Her jewelry is replete with *content*, whereas Calder's is more naive; that is, he was expressing the most basic, empirical approach to working metal – the result being his version of what a primitive metalsmith might produce. Whereas both Calder and Falkenstein created large-scale jewelry, the latter's was far more body-conscious and more sensitive to the effects of the wearer's movements. In this respect, Falkenstein's jewelry was more akin to Art Smith's. Both regarded the body as an armature on which to hand sculptural jewelry and thereby created large, dramatic pieces with a potential for movement. Also, both made necklaces that encircled the back of the neck but remained open at the front or side. Additionally, there are examples of jewelry by Falkenstein and Smith that employ metal springs to hold stones in place by tension.[9] These mechanical similarities between the jewelry of Claire Falkenstein and Art Smith, perhaps hide the fact that their intentions were quite different. Ibram Lassaw's purpose in jewelry design reveals in closer affinity to Falkenstein's, although their methods differ. Lassaw, while employing organic metal forms to define cosmic phenomena, resorts to fused molten bronze to depict the atomic structure of nature while she uses forged wire to define modules in space. Falkenstein's expression is freer; more is left to the viewer's imagination.

Claire Falkenstein must have had a great influence on several midcentury jewelers, including Californian, Bob Winston, New Yorkers, Adda Husted-Andersen and Pearl Schechter and in the nestlike forms of Southerner, Earl Pardon. Irena Byrnner, who lived in San Francisco in the late 1940s, wrote: "...During this same period [late 1940s] I saw my first piece of contemporary jewelry – a necklace by Claire Falkenstein. It enchanted me... At this time I knew I would have to choose a new creative medium [other than sculpture]...I wanted to be free to express myself with sincerity and a craft seemed to offer this... Jewelry seemed less limiting [than pottery], and after serious consideration, I chose it. Claire Falkenstein's necklace was a contributing factor in this decision."[10]



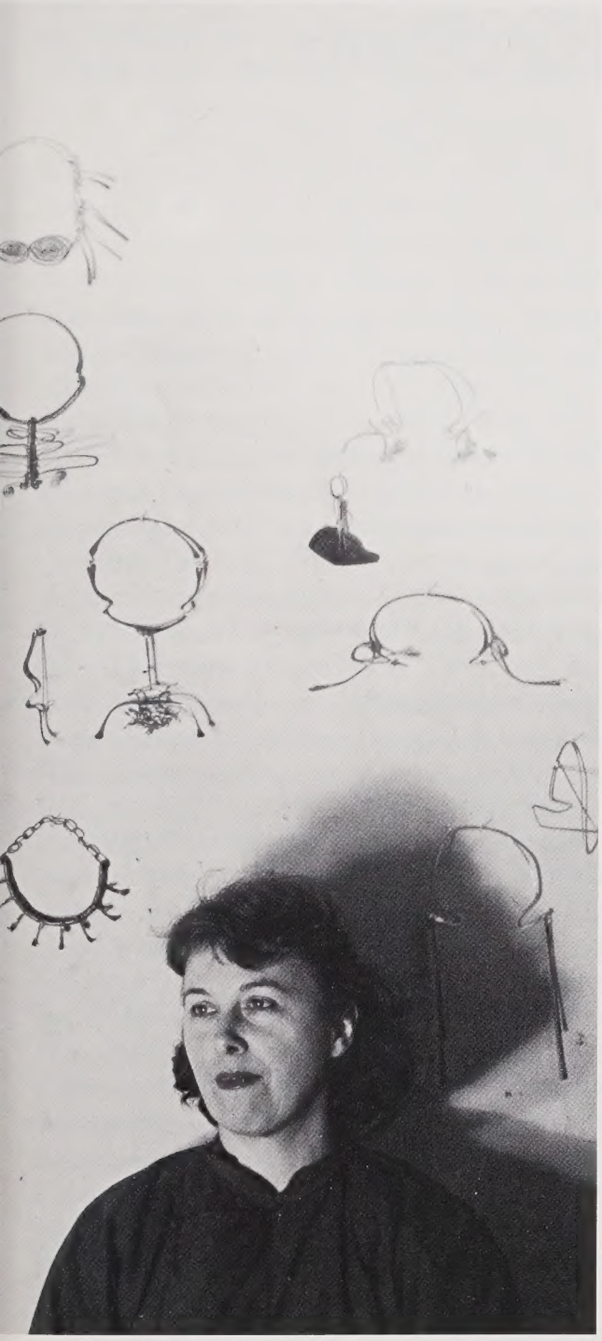
**5** ***Integral Necklace*, gold, rose quartz, 1976**



Falkenstein's jewelry was exhibited in the "First International Exhibition of Modern Jewelry," held at Goldsmith's Hall in London in 1961 and in "Jewelry by Painters and Sculptors" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1967. She left Europe in 1963 and set up a studio in Venice, California, where she still lives and works.

As recently as December 1986, in conjunction with her retrospective at Jack Rutberg Fine Arts (New York and Los Angeles), art critic, Merle Schipper wrote: "...despite the diversity of mediums this remarkable artist has explored [s]he has combined a highly inventive sensibility with an awareness of contemporary movements and masters and to developments that have been in the air... [S]he continually reassessed her basic vocabulary – from discontinuous reflective surfaces of curved flat metal plates to networks of thick, coiled rods gripping chunks of glittering colored glass... Still attuned with the times..., Falkenstein continues to update those forms [and] vigorously declares herself timelessly young."[11] She is still most active at age 82 and has just completed a solo exhibition, "Chasing the Line," at the Conejo Valley Art Museum in Thousand Oaks, California.

**Claire Falkenstein with necklaces, 1953**



## Notes

1. Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Sculpture* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1964), p. 253.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Quoted by Henry J. Seldis, "Art," *L.A. Times* Oct. 12, 1969, p. 56.
4. Michel Tapie, *Claire Falkenstein* (Rome: de Luca Art Monographs, 1958), p. 5.
5. Dr. Hope B. Werness, *Claire Falkenstein: The Never-Ending Screen*, catalog of exhibition at University Art Gallery, California State University, Stanislaus, March 9 – April 29, 1987.
6. From a conversation with Claire Falkenstein and the author on November 16, 1990.
7. Lynn Creighton, *A Tribute to Claire Falkenstein*, n.p.
8. *Op cit.*, conversation.
9. Note the similarity in Falkenstein's handling of gemstones, held in place by twisted metal wire, in her jewelry and her use of Venetian glass inclusions in her screens and gates.
10. Irena Brynner, *Jewelry as an Art Form* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), pp. 6, 7.
11. Merle Schipper, "Claire Falkenstein: Jack Rutberg" *Art News*, Dec. 1986, p. 27.

*Toni Lesser Wolf is a jewelry historian, lecturer, curator and writer living in New York City.*

# JEWELRY

## *It's* NOT *a Pretty Picture*

*by Susan Kingsley*

A woman's job evaluation included the observation that she showed unmistakable signs of penis envy. "The unmistakable signs were...her dangling earrings. Why would a woman wear jewelry that dangles if she did not envy the one thing in nature that dangles naturally?"[1]

In a column by Calvin Trillin, standards for evaluating boyfriends for daughters of "serious-linkage age" were examined. Guys with four earrings in one ear were in the "...simple no. So don't even think about it" category. Trillin declared, however, that, "If he's enrolled in a fully accredited graduate or professional program, one earring is OK."[2]

The United States Supreme Court upheld a ruling against two Peotone, Illinois policemen, who were severely reprimanded (including a demotion and pay cut) for wearing ear studs. The court said the ban on ear studs should apply even when the men are off duty, "because the community is small and most people know who the officers are even when they are out of uniform."[3]

A photograph covering two pages in *The New York Times Magazine*: A slender woman is lying crosswise on a bed in a dimly lit room. (1) She is sleeping with one knee sharply bent, in a semifetal position. Her satiny slip is pulled up to reveal her thigh. She is hugging a pillow, and holds a string of pearls loosely in one hand. Around her on the bed are seven more pieces of jewelry, a small book and a bunch of roses in a cellophane wrapper. At the bottom there is the caption, "2:48 AM, Paris. Marya asleep on a bed of pearls." This is an ad for the spring jewelry collection of Victoria International.[4]

In most cultures, the function of jewelry is to affirm values, symbolize commonly held beliefs, define social status and demonstrate wealth. As the above items illustrate, there are some rather odd ideas about what jewelry means, definite rules about which gender is allowed to wear it and some very curious ways of advertising it. What are our commonly held beliefs about jewelry? Just what does jewelry mean, and how does it function in our culture?

Do women who wear dangling earrings really envy male anatomy? The woman in the interview was a Ph.D. family therapist, and the job was at a psychoanalytic institute. To those who believe in Freudian psychoanalytic theory, it is true (and anyone who disagrees is repressing the truth).[5] This is an example of looking at the world through the frame of a particular belief system, which is not (thankfully, in this case) endorsed by our culture in general. Most people would find this interpretation absurd.

The readers of this magazine share beliefs about jewelry that are different than those held by the culture-at-large. These beliefs have not been canonized and do not have the following of Freudian psychology, but they color our understanding of jewelry in a similar way. To many people, our ideas about jewelry seem equally absurd.

The belief that jewelry is an art form is one that most of us share. Yet this idea is rejected by the "art world." There are only a handful of galleries in this country that represent jewelry artists. Garth Clark, who expected his CDK Gallery to be, "an acknowledgment of jewelry as an art form," elevating its status in the eyes of curators, collectors and critics of the art world, closed its doors after only eight months. He "...found there was active hostility from the art community towards the jewelry. At best, they were passive about it, but often they actively disliked it as being pretentious and trying to emulate art."[6]

In our culture, which includes the "art world," jewelry is something other than art. Jewelry is defined by a different and separate system of commonly held beliefs about its function and meaning. The meaning of the word "jewelry" is not found in the actual jewelry object but in a concept of jewelry that functions within our cultural system. The cultural values and beliefs about jewelry that are symbolized by an object are what makes it jewelry. In other words, jewelry is a concept or belief system. An object that is consistent with our system of cultural beliefs about jewelry is jewelry.

1 "2:48 AM, Paris. Marya asleep on a bed of pearls." *New York Times Magazine*, March 1, 1987

The concept of jewelry is contained in a system of beliefs that includes everything about it. The type of object, its function, proper size, materials, cost, who can and cannot wear it, where and how it should be obtained, what status it conveys, who can give it to whom and the implications of receiving it, are all parts of this system. Objects that fit within the frame of this belief system are jewelry. Objects that do not, are not jewelry.

The meaning of jewelry is also contained in its difference from other concepts and belief systems. Art is a different belief system, with its own myths. Because jewelry and art are different systems of cultural practice, a jewelry object will be understood only as part of the system that identifies it as jewelry. The particular qualities of the object have nothing to do with whether or not it is art. It will not be understood as art, because it is jewelry. (Cultural beliefs about art also prevent jewelry from being understood as art, but that is another story.) The primary reason that jewelry is not art is that it is jewelry.

The meaning of art is a subject of endless debate. No aspect of culture is examined more carefully. In contrast, the meaning of jewelry is presumed. Common beliefs about jewelry in our culture are considered "natural." Why is it that women can wear earrings, but that certain men have been forbidden to wear them by the Supreme Court? Why is jewelry advertised with a picture of a sleeping woman? What is the meaning of jewelry?

What appears to be "natural" is really a screen that obscures a hidden agenda. Cultures tend to conceal their ideological interests in this way, because if we were aware of the cultural agenda, we might not conform.[7] What could we learn about jewelry if we looked at our "common sense" beliefs and beyond? What cultural agenda lurks behind jewelry? How can we determine what is behind conventional thinking about jewelry? Where can we find clues?

Marshall McLuhan said that "...historians and archaeologists will one day discover that the ads of our time are the richest and most faithful daily reflections that any society ever made of its entire range of activities."[8] Advertising is, of course, intended to make you want to buy something. It does so by promoting the system of beliefs that makes something desirable. Advertising does not create our consumer fantasies, it merely exploits ideas that already exist in our subconscious minds.[9] Advertising isn't trying to sell you the thing but is telling you how you can fulfill your dreams and desires by buying something. While there may be merit to some claims that advertising creates the need for useless items, and jewelry has no "use," jewelry and its mythology have a much longer history than advertising.

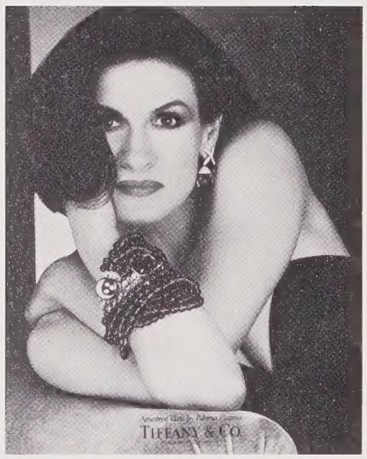
Jewelry is a luxury item. Its meaning is culturally constructed, and its use is symbolic. Jewelry advertising explains its symbolism and serves as a guide to using jewelry to obtain desired social responses. Advertising and jewelry seem made for each other. The myths of jewelry are some of the most fertile ground for advertising. There is a flourishing hidden cultural agenda, and it all seems so "natural" that we do not even see the garden.

Advertising is believable because it tells us things that we already "know." In context, the ads seem predictable, familiar and harmless. Because they are advertising, we don't stop to study and think about what we are seeing and reading. We tend to dismiss advertising for traditional, commercial and manufactured jewelry as unimportant because the jewelry objects are different than our own. We overlook the fact that what is being promoted is not the actual jewelry in the picture but a whole system of cultural beliefs about jewelry. Whether we like it or not, all jewelry is understood through a single mythic frame.

The ads selected for discussion here were published in magazines during the past three years.[10] After dozens of ads were examined critically, a number of themes became apparent. The ads presented here are examples that typify these themes. While some of the "readings" of these ads might seem niggling, it should be remembered that they are very expensive, carefully constructed productions. Nothing in these ads is accidental.

So, why is "Marya asleep on a bed of pearls?" (1) Why, at 2:48 AM, Paris? The little book is probably her passport. She has just arrived in Paris, which, everyone knows, is the most romantic city in the world. A woman lying on a bed is a conventional expression of sexual availability. The roses in cellophane mean that someone was there to greet her. She fell asleep on the bed while "playing" with her jewelry. Her position reminds one of a child who has fallen asleep with favorite toys. The message here is that jewelry and romance go together and that women are like children when it comes to jewelry. The ad suggests that someone should tuck her in.

The ad is also about the happiness of being envied by others. Our peek at Marya allows us to observe her state of happiness and to imagine our own happiness, were we observed in her shoes (or in this case, her bed). The promise of advertising, according to social critic John Berger, is not simply pleasure, but the promise of happiness as judged from the outside by others. "The happiness of being envied is glamour."[11] Paris, romance, roses and the jewelry represent a fantasy in which the viewer can imagine him/her self being envied by others.

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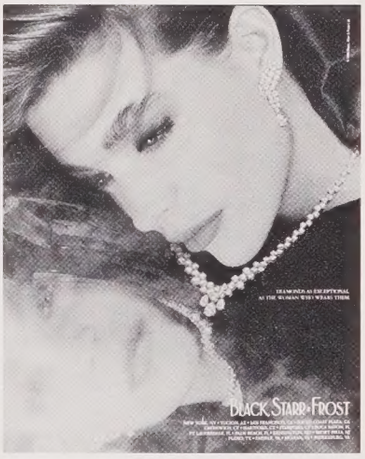


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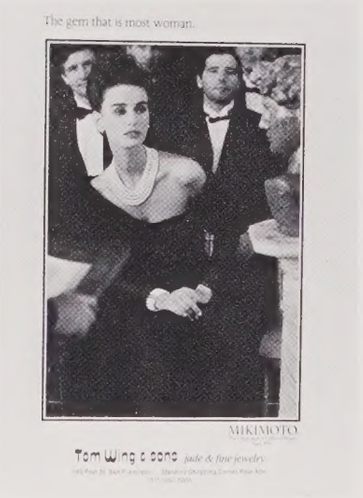



4

WHILE IT'S EXCITING TO OBSERVE BEAUTY,
IT'S EVEN MORE THRILLING TO ENHANCE IT.
NOVA
DIAMONDS AS EXCEPTIONAL
AS THE WOMAN WHO WEARS THEM

5

Jewelry is traditionally connected with the glamour of rich and famous people, especially movie stars and royalty. Their wealth, status, power and romantic attraction are symbolized by jewelry. Two great romances of the century, between King Edward VIII and Wallis Warfield Simpson and Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton, were accompanied by extravagant jewelry. They are glamorous because we imagine and envy their supposed happiness.

Some of the most memorable jewelry ads based on glamour are the Paloma ads. (2) As the daughter of Picasso, she symbolizes the tradition and authority of art (which will be discussed later), and, as herself, she symbolizes the glamour of the international jet-set. Sociologist Diane Barthel says that "Today, jet-setters, rock stars and fashion models have the most glamour, because they presumably have the most freedom; their lives resemble adolescent fantasies devoid of adult responsibilities. Their work, if they work, appears to be play; the world is their playground."[12] In the author's estimation, the unimaginative jewelry designed and modeled by Paloma Picasso is successful because it is so mindless; in an odd twist, the mediocrity of her jewelry contributes to its glamour.

Another example from a series of ads reads, "Diamonds as exceptional as the woman who wears them." (3) Here a flawless woman, wearing diamond earrings and a diamond necklace, is staring down dreamily at her own image in a mirror. Her foggy reflected image gazes out toward the viewer through unfocused eyes.

This type of image has been described by sociologist Erving Goffman as licensed withdrawal. He says that women, more often than men, are pictured engaged in involvements that remove them psychologically from the social situation. They appear disoriented and dependent on the protectiveness and good will of others who are (or might come to be) present.[13]

The theme of woman-with-a-mirror is a leftover from art history. It symbolized women's vanity, self-absorption and passivity, and was used by men in the last century to represent "her perverse unwillingness to recognize that it was her natural, predestined duty to yield her ego to man's will."[14]

Advertising is often derived from themes and images from art history. John Berger explains that"Art is a sign of affluence; it belongs to the good life..." and "...suggests a cultural authority, a form of dignity, even wisdom, which is superior to any vulgar material interest..."[15] In this case, the art reference works on several levels. It establishes that this is the good life and that, therefore, these diamonds are not vulgar. And the wisdom of centuries of patriarchal cultural tradition reminds us, visually, that vanity and self-absorption are feminine traits.

"Diamonds as exceptional as the woman who wears them," in this ad, implies that diamonds are comparable to exceptional women. Does this mean women with high IQs? No, it means women with exceptional beauty, like the woman in the picture. The message is that a woman's value is in her beauty.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art had a hit in its gift shop last year. "Venus Earrings" were reportedly seen all over New York.[16] They were copied from pearl-drop earrings worn by the goddess of love in *Venus Before the Mirror,* painted by Peter Paul Rubens around 1616. The museum's jewelry catalog explains that the "painting shows the nude Venus in front of a mirror held by the boyish god Amor. The position of the mirror allows Venus, through the reflection in the glass, to gaze flirtatiously at the viewer, expressing the alluring coquetry which is central to her being."

2 "Amethyst Ideas by Paloma Picasso," *Town and Country*, June 1988

3 "Diamonds as exceptional as the woman who wears them." *Town and Country*, October 1988

4 "The gem that is most woman." *Connoisseur*, November 1989

5 "While it's exciting to observe beauty, it's even more thrilling to enhance it." *Town and Country*, August 1988

The catalog goes on to explain that the painting is in the "Princely Collections of Liechtenstein... now the only surviving principality of the Holy Roman Empire," and was "acquired to decorate their splendid palaces and to display their wealth and connoisseurship." And finally, if that isn't enough cultural authority, prestige and glamour, it adds the myth that pearls are associated with love, and "may have represented drops of water that fell from the love goddess as she stepped from her bath."

Pearls are, in another ad, "The gem that is most woman." (4) In this ad, a attractive young woman is seated in front of what appears to be a lectern (gripped by a male hand) and a classical bust on a pedestal. We feel the authority of art again. She is leaning forward and slightly to one side and is looking intently yet without expression in the direction of the sculpture. She appears lost in thought. Her licensed withdrawal is this time "anchored drift." While she has mentally drifted from the physical scene, she is in the presence of a man who appears ready to cope with anything that might present itself.[17] The man behind her on the right appears protective and even a bit threatening.

She is wearing a formal black dress that covers her arms and legs but is falling, apparently without her knowledge, off one shoulder. She is also wearing a lot of pearls. Behind her are seated three more formally dressed men. They are looking at the viewer with knowing smiles. She is like the sculpture on the pedestal, she is something to look at. This is an art history lecture, and here, as throughout western art history, women have been on display for men. She is the object, an object, of the male gaze. She is like the gem. "The gem that is most woman."

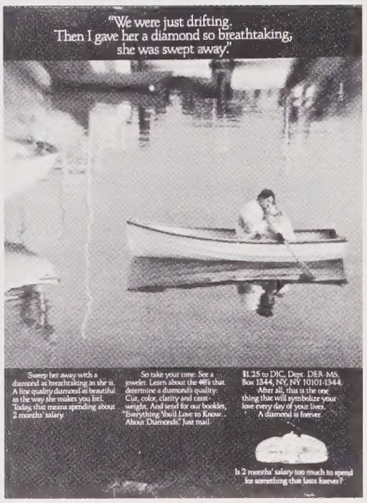
In another ad, a young woman is slouched in a richly upholstered wing chair. (5) Her head is turned to one side and her forehead is resting on the side of the chair. She appears idle, as if she is waiting for direction.[18] She is looking directly at the camera, smiling slightly at the viewer, as if to signal agreement. The picture is dark except for her face and one hand, which is positioned carefully to display a large diamond ring. The caption reads, "While it's exciting to observe beauty, it's even more thrilling to enhance it." The copy states, "Some men have the ability not only to embrace beauty, but to revel in it. They joyfully acknowledge that there is a particular pleasure in giving something rare and lovely. The rarest and loveliest object of all being a fine quality diamond of a carat or more." This "tells the world that you delight in that which is truly and eternally beautiful."

Here again, the woman is a beautiful "it." She appears to be left out of the conversation, but she doesn't seem to mind terribly. She seems satisfied with the ring. It contains a three carat diamond and 30 baguettes. This ad suggests that "some men," are better than other men. "Some men" can recognize beauty. They can "embrace" and "revel" and "delight" and get "particular pleasure" and use words like "rare" and "lovely." The ad suggests that a man can gain the status of a connoisseur by making the "right" choice. By buying diamonds, a man "tells the world" that he knows what the best gift is – diamonds – and that he is a rich and generous fellow.

The passive woman in the chair recalls many images from the 19th century of women seated in chairs in domestic settings. Although upper class men worked, the only socially acceptable role for upper class women was idleness. Women themselves were considered decorative objects. Idleness and passivity are constant themes in recent jewelry advertising. Not one ad, in the dozens examined, pictured a woman engaged in any task. In fact, most of the jewelry pictured looks as if it was intended to encumber the wearer, making even the idea of work seem inappropriate. The message is clear: idle women wearing jewelry symbolize upper-class status.

A large percentage of jewelry advertising suggests that jewelry be given as a gift. Jewelry is a particularly suitable gift because it has no use. Gifts are meant to be social statements, not contributions to the recipient's well being.[19] The above ad suggests that a man who buys diamond jewelry as a gift is making a statement about his social status and generosity.

Other ads intended for men suggest that jewelry is a way of getting what they want. Through the bestowal of gifts, a man not only demonstrates his superior economic position, he ties the receiver more closely to himself. In giving jewelry to a woman, he establishes the terms of the relationship. "The gift comes to represent the power contract, his economic power in exchange for her sexual power." In this way, "jewelry is presented as the measure of what a man is willing to pay for a woman. It represents the reward for feminine virtue, or for its surrender."[20]

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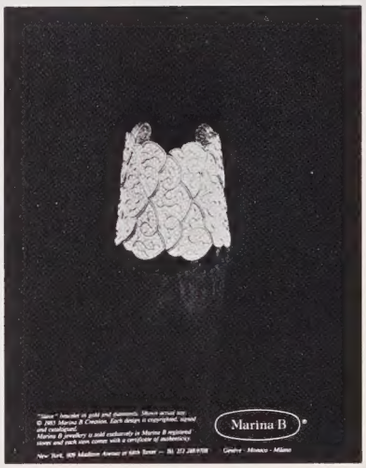


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A man and woman are pictured in a rowboat. (6) The picture is slightly grainy and unfocused, like a dream. The scene reminds one of an Impressionist painting. The boat, of course, symbolizes that they are embarking on a journey. The man is seated holding an oar, in position to row, signaling that he is in charge here. The woman, who appears dwarfed by him, is leaning against him with her head on his shoulder. His other arm is around her. He states, "We were just drifting. Then I gave her a diamond so breathtaking, she was swept away." The ad is very specific about the actual cost. It takes two months salary to buy a "breathtaking diamond." The idea of courting a woman with jewelry has been around for a while. Shakespeare observed in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, "Dumb jewels often in their silent kind, more than quick words, do move a woman's mind."

Barthel states that diamond engagement and wedding rings symbolize, in our culture, "not simply individual commitment, but commitment to social adulthood," and acceptance of traditional adult roles. She goes on to explain that cultures often select certain older, "wiser" people to give advice in explaining the significance and performance of its ritual steps. Anthropologists call these people adepts. She points out that in "magazine advertisements the leading adepts are the jewelers. These wise men (they are always shown as men) help the young couple" make the right choices in the ritual of ring exchange.[21]

The role of jewels in the giving of gifts was also mentioned by Edward Lucie-Smith in his introduction to *The Story of Jewelry*. "Apparently an expression of good will, the gift carries an overtone of hostility, because it puts the recipient into our debt, and therefore into our power. In European culture, in recent centuries, jewels have essentially been the gift of the man to the woman, the expression of a wish for physical possession."[22] There are numerous jewelry ads that show women in a state of ecstasy, swooning or appearing disheveled or ravished. (7) This could imply that they have been "possessed" by a man, or that they simply have been transported by happiness.[23]

Lucie-Smith goes on to comment on the "ambiguous" symbolism of slave bracelets, chokers that resemble collars worn by dogs or slaves, and bracelets that look like manacles. (8) One could add heavy chains to the list. The theme of the female as slave is not uncommon in both jewelry and ad images in recent years. (9) One cannot help but recall the popularity of the theme of the nude female slave in 19th century sculpture.

He also pointed out the "aggressive phallic symbolism" in many designs, especially the many examples of snake jewelry from the 19th century. This type of imagery could be extended to include the prevalence of ads for all types of jewelry picturing women as creatures from some primordial swamp. In these ads women appear in jungle settings, naked and caked with mud or dressed and made up to resemble animals. They are depicted as untamed, uncivilized creatures with primitive instincts and undeveloped intellects, and they wear jewelry. (10)

Misogynist fantasies such as these, which equate women with a primitive "nature," are also left over from the last century when it was thought that females had not been able to participate in the great evolutionary process that was guiding the intellectual male.[24] Women of color often are pictured as the subhumans in these ads, rendering the ads racist as well.

While it seems natural that women wear jewelry, this reoccurring linkage of jewelry with the primitive female is troublesome. Perhaps women, by wearing jewelry, maintain and exhibit a connection to their physical being, while men, having assumed a position of intellectual superiority, reject jewelry in order to evince transcendence over their bodies. Perhaps jewelry symbolizes a cultural agenda – a desire to differentiate the intellectual male from the intellectually inferior, and more physical, female.

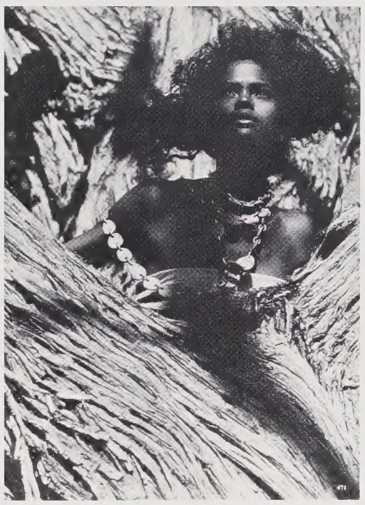
6 "We were just drifting. Then I gave her a diamond so breathtaking, she was swept away." *Ms.*, July/August 1987

7 Swooning woman in diamonds and sapphires, *Town and Country*, December 1988

8 "Slave Bracelet," *Town and Country*, November 1988

9 Woman as slave with jewelry, *San Francisco Focus*, May 1990

10 Primitive woman in tree, wearing jewelry, *Vogue*, March 1990



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Why does the notion of jewelry on a man seem "unnatural" and "unmanly?" Berger suggests that "A man's presence is dependent upon the promise of power which he embodies." His appearance communicates his power to affect others, either physically, with his larger more muscular body, or through his financial power and authority.[25]

A woman's presence, and her identity, are determined solely by her beauty. Her "attractiveness," her ability to attract others through her appearance, determines how she will be treated. A woman's appearance, and how successfully she plays her beauty role, determines her status and identity.[26]

Men are simply not expected to use jewelry to establish an identity, to create their status or maintain their presence. Perhaps men who wear ear studs upset fathers-of-daughters and small Illinois towns because they raise questions about the meaning of manhood. Perhaps jewelry has become linked to the absence of power in the wearer and appears as a compensation. A man who wears jewelry thus appears to be unmanly, threatening the universal promise of power men are supposed to embody.

There are, of course, a few exceptions to the male jewelry taboo. A man may wear a watch, an ID bracelet, a wedding or class ring, a tiny lapel pin, a tie tack or cuff links. He can wear a western belt buckle or bolo if he is a cowboy and a gold chain if he is a pimp or a baseball player. He can even wear large diamond rings if he happens to be Fats Domino, Liberace or Sammy Davis Jr. Other than these, when the symbolism is obvious and/or intended, it raises questions. As Clark observed, "when a man wears jewelry... everybody comments.... people can't understand why you are wearing something."[27]

An advertising campaign for men's jewelry was run in *Ms.* magazine in 1988, before it went ad-free, "The Man's Diamond. When a Woman Loves a Man."[28] (11) It is subtle. The woman appears slightly larger, higher and in front of the man, dominating the picture. This role reversal is repeated by the fact that the man is leaning off balance, and the woman appears upright, stable and in control. The woman has a simple, straightforward hairstyle and is wearing a dark suit and white blouse. She looks businesslike, except that her skirt is very short and we see a lot of leg. The man is wearing a mismatched light colored plaid jacket, light-colored trousers, striped shirt and tie, and if you look carefully, a very *small* tie tack. She has her hand on his shoulder and is tugging playfully on the tie. They do not appear to be married.[29] "Because we can't always be together, here's a little part of me you can always take with you." He is looking directly at the viewer and laughing, because he knows it's a joke.

The ad is in black and white because it is a dream. Everything about it is a fantasy of role reversal. Women do not yet have economic equality with men. Most women do not earn enough money to buy gifts of diamond jewelry, and men don't wear jewelry anyway. Everybody knows that men traditionally exhibit proprietary "ownership" of women; men give diamonds to women (sometimes an implied payoff for guilt) and men are the ones who are expected to have the high-paying, important careers. This is a fantasy about having it all; a high-paying job, a man who plays along and sexy legs.

Other ads that allude to new post-feminist thinking are the ones suggesting that women buy jewelry for themselves. (12) In this one, the photo is framed like a portrait and, again, borrows the dreamy soft illusion of Impressionist painting. A pretty, young woman with Pre-Raphaelite hair and a gold necklace looks down demurely in licensed withdrawal.[30] The ad reads: "It had been staring at me from the window for, I don't know, a month I guess. Every day, walking to and from work, I'd see it. And every time I'd think to myself, 'Oh, someday. Someday when I've got something to celebrate.' And then, yesterday, I finally realized that this gold necklace was something to celebrate, all by itself. I think it's that beautiful. The way it looks around my neck is just that perfect. And really, how often do you get to feel that way?"

This is a young woman with a job, but apparently no financial responsibilities or financial plan. It reflects and reinforces old notions about women working for "pocket money," for extra spending money, while men work because they must support families. In addition, she reinforces the stereotypes about women being narcissistic, self-centered, indecisive and likely to make purchasing decisions on impulse for illogical reasons.

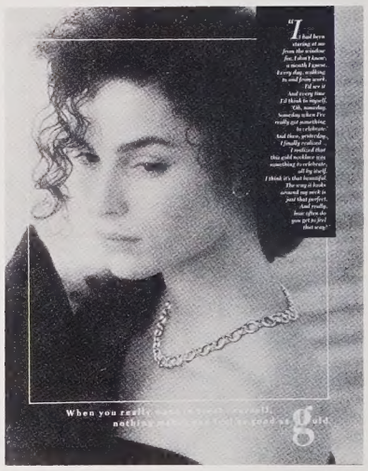
She may have a job, but she still represents "traditional" female roles. She has no goals that would require her to save the money she earns. "Someday," meaning someday when she finds a man (to take care of her), she will have something to celebrate. But until then, she will have to substitute something "that perfect" around her beautiful neck. Here, as well as in the ad with the boat, jewelry is equated with fulfillment. In the boat ad, the man is told that the diamond is "as beautiful as the way she makes you feel." In this ad, the question, "How often do you get to feel that way?" refers to the same thing, sexual fulfillment. The man can get it from a (beautiful) woman, but the woman (who isn't supposed to have any sexual feelings of her own), can get it from jewelry. The woman is supposed to retain a childlike, virginal innocence and like Marya, get her pleasure from jewelry.

11 "The Man's Diamond. When a Woman Loves a Man." *Ms.*, September 1988

12 "When you really want to treat yourself, nothing makes you feel as good as gold." *Vogue*, August 1988

The Man's Diamond. When a Woman Loves a Man.
"Because we can't always be together, here's a little part of me you can always take with you."
A diamond is forever.

11

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Finally, we are told, "When you really want to treat yourself, nothing makes you feel as good as gold." In other words, if you want to buy yourself happiness, if you want to be envied, you should buy the thing that gives you the most status, "real" gold jewelry. What is implied is that jewelry made of any other material will not not produce the desired social result (and you won't feel as good).

The majority of ads feature jewelry made of precious stones, mainly diamonds and pearls. Out of dozens of ads, there are many promoting gold, and few showing even silver jewelry. (Some exhibit jewelry of other materials, but these are fashion ads.) One is forced to conclude that jewelry requires the use of precious materials. Objects not made of precious materials do not fit cultural practices associated with jewelry, cannot function as social statements and do not carry within them the commonly held beliefs and easily understood symbolism of jewelry.

Objects made of other materials are not advertised or sold as jewelry but as fashion. Fashion is a different belief system that is based upon rapid social change and personal transformation. Although objects may appear similar because of their function, they belong to separate belief systems because of their different materials. For example, titanium earrings and gold earrings appear to have the same function but belong to different belief systems. The belief system that defines jewelry requires the prestige of precious materials.

Most of us understand jewelry as an object, as a thing apart from cultural beliefs about jewelry. As artists, we choose materials for our own, independent and esthetic reasons. We understand jewelry as the product of an artistic process. We experience jewelry on a variety of levels, in many of the same ways that we appreciate other art forms. We recognize formal and conceptual concerns as well as process and technical proficiency. In addition women metalsmiths and men in this field who attempt to wear jewelry may experience additional levels of awareness. We experience jewelry as art because of this perspective.

Many of us believe that we are making art, and we want the objects that we make to be understood as art objects. But jewelry can only be understood as jewelry. The cultural baggage carried by jewelry just won't fit through the doors of art galleries. It's not that the objects themselves are not art, it is that they can only be understood by our culture as jewelry. For the same reason, the objects many of us make will also not "fit in" at the jewelry store at the local mall.

Jewelry, according to our cultural belief system, does not require an artist or any artistic intention. Its meaning is written by the anonymous hand of cultural authority. Its quality is determined by its precious materials, and its cost and its value are determined by its capacity to indicate status. Its symbolism and significance are provided by our culture.

But status is not the only, or even the primary function of jewelry. The main function of jewelry in our culture is to symbolize and sustain the gender hierarchy. Jewelry provides ritual objects for paying homage to the patriarchy. Jewelry is not about love and beauty; it is about power. Jewelry symbolizes the unequal positions of women and men in our culture. It symbolizes men's claim to intellectual superiority and women's supposedly primitive nature. It serves as a visual reminder of men's economic power and women's dependence upon men. It promotes and perpetuates almost all the misogynist myths and stereotypes about women that evolved during the last century.

These cultural myths that define jewelry do not frame a pretty picture. Jewelry is not what it seems. Jewelry is admired for its beauty, desired for its status and is believed to symbolize the universal, timeless themes of love and beauty. Jewelry seems so seductive, so innocent, so harmless, that one simply does not expect to find a hidden agenda. And that may be why the myths of jewelry are so very, very effective.

*Susan Kingsley is a feminist and artist/metalsmith from Carmel, CA.*

NOTES

1. Carol Travis, "Breaking Away From the Cult," (review of *Final Analysis: The Making and Unmaking of a Psychoanalyst*, by Jeffery Moussaieff Masson), *The New York Times Book Review*, October 21, 1990, p. 7.

2 *Alta Vista Magazine*, November 18, 1990, p. 19.

3. *Monterey Peninsula Herald*, October 16, 1990.

4. *New York Times Magazine*, March 1, 1987, pp. 54-55.

5. Travis, "Breaking Away From the Cult," p. 7.

6. Donald Friedlich and Judith Mitchell, "The Closing of Doors, an Interview with Garth Clark," *Metalsmith*, Volume 10, Number 3, Summer 1990, p. 14.

7. Jack Solomon, Ph.D., *The Signs of Our Time*, (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1988), p. 11.

8. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964), p. 232.

9. *Op. cit.*, Solomon, p. 66.

10. *Connoisseur, Lear's, Ms., New York Times Magazine, San Francisco Focus, Town and Country, Vogue*, 1988–1990.

11. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), p. 132.

12. Diane Barthel, *Putting on Appearances: Gender and Advertising*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 118.

13. Erving Goffman, *Gender Advertisements*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 57.

14. Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 135.

15. *Op. cit.*, Berger, p. 135.

16. *Glamour*, "What They're Wearing," October 1990, p. 226.

17. *Op. cit.*, Goffman, p. 65.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 70. It is implied that action is taking place and that she is "on the edge" of it, but not involved or "available." This photo is another variation of licensed withdrawal in which the person is "participation shielded" from events and not exposed to scrutiny and address.

19. Michael Schudson, *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1984), p. 140. He also points out that "For gift-giving purposes, the quality of the good may be less important than cultural assumptions, partly shaped by advertising, about the product's status."

20. *Op. cit.*, Barthel, p. 161.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

22. J. Anderson Black, *The Story of Jewelry*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1974), introduction by Edward Lucie-Smith.

23. *Op. cit.*, Goffman, p. 68. "Perhaps the implication is that a women, like a child with an ice cream cone, can find some sort of final satisfaction in goals that can be fully realized in the present."

24. *Op. cit.*, Dijkstra, cover

25. *Op. cit.*, Berger, p. 45.

26. *Op. cit.*, Barthel, p. 10.

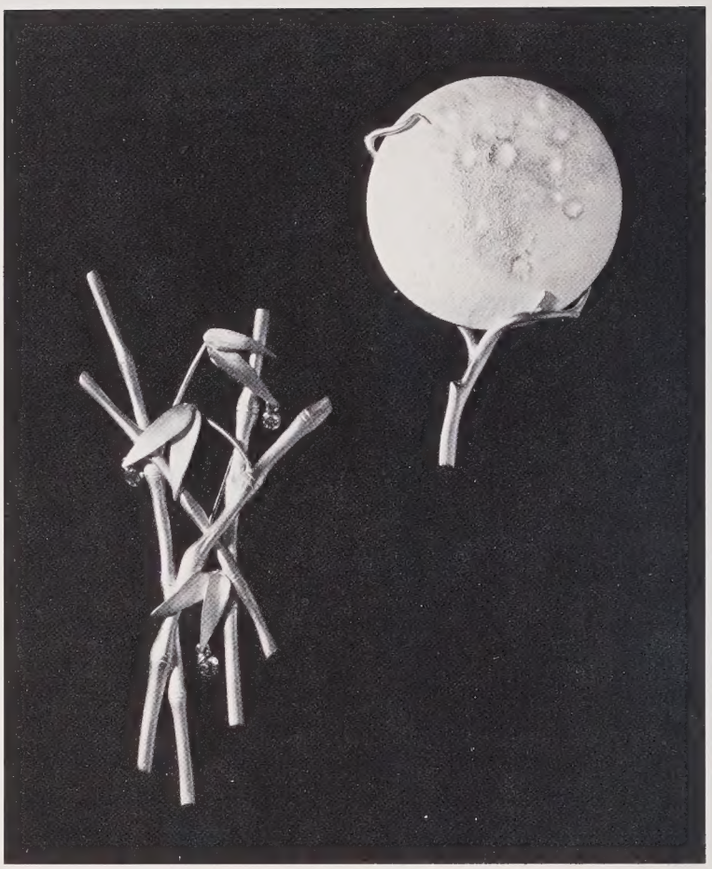
27. *Op. cit.*, Friedlich and Mitchell, p. 40.

28. Ms. magazine was reborn without advertising in 1990. In the premier issue, Gloria Steinem wrote an exposé *Sex, Lies, and Advertising* that reveals the connection between advertising and editorial content in magazines. One example of an "insertion order" to women's magazines was from the De Beers diamond company. It prohibits magazines from placing their ads with "adjacencies to hard news or anti-love/romance themed editorial." (Ms. July/August 1990, p. 26.)

29. Goffman, p. 55. The "shoulder hold" configuration requires that the person being held accept direction and restraint. "When employed by a cross-sexed adult pair, the sign seems to be taken to indicate sexually-potential proprietaryship."

30. Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, (New York: Viking Press, 1975), pp. 72-73. Hollander says that Pre-Raphaelite hair, like the Pre-Raphaelite face and body, was one of the truly original images invented by 19th-century art. "Thick abundant female hair safely conveyed a vivid sexual message in an atmosphere of extreme prudery..."

# Reviews



**RIGHT**
Larissa Rosenstock
*Bamboo* brooch
18k gold, diamonds
Inspired by the 18th c. Japanese poet Buson's:

"Lightening flash, crash...
Waiting in the Bamboo grove
See three dew-drops fall."

**FAR RIGHT**
Larissa Rosenstock
*Moon* brooch
sterling silver, 18k gold
from Sokan's:

"Take the round flat moon
Snap this twig
For handle...
What a pretty fan!"

## *The Haiku Show*

Aaron Farber Gallery, New York City
January 18 – February 23, 1991

by Anne Crowley Tom

The theme of the show, haiku (the traditional Japanese, 17-syllable, three-line poem) was the idea of goldsmith Antonia Schwed, brought to fruition by curator Patricia Faber. Traditional haiku always alludes to nature and seasons, referenced through symbols, like frogs to summer and cherry blossoms to spring. Hiroko Sato Pijanowski illustrates her own haiku about a drifting cherry blossom on a frozen sea with a piece that has a textured, plexiglass table top with a removable brooch of fine silver, gilded gold and *shibuichi* in the form of a cherry blossom.

But, while Hiroko's contemporary design in Japanese-influenced, Antonia Schwed's piece has a native American or pre-Columbian esthetic. Schwed responds specifically to the humorous poem of Issa, one of the four great masters of haiku:

*You hear that fat frog*
*In the seat of honor, singing*
*Bass? ... That's the boss.*

Her sterling silver and vitreous-enamel necklace, striking and stylized, stays within the bounds of abstraction.

A more literal approach is taken by Chris Darway, who interprets a humorous event described by the last of the four great Japanese masters, Shiki:

*Oh! I ate them all*
*And Oh! what a stomach ache...*
*Green stolen apples*

Darway presents this scene in *Oh! Green Apples* – the raised design of a stomach with two green tourmaline apples on a square pin of 14k yellow and white gold, sterling silver and copper.

Larissa Rosenstock illustrates the work of the earliest of the four great masters of Haiku, Basho, in *Bamboo Brooch.* In Rosenstock's 18k yellow gold and diamond brooch with its calligraphic brushstrokes, there is the harmony and perfect tone of one who studies traditional art of many cultures.

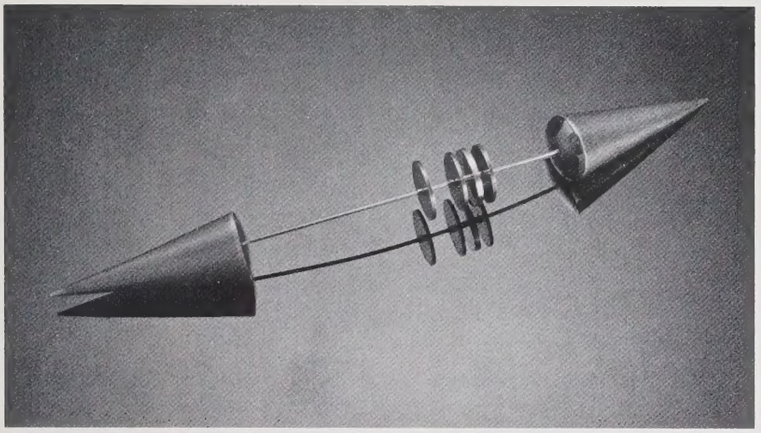
Carrie Adell best reflects the Zen Buddhist roots of traditional Japanese haiku in her own poems and the jewelry through which she illustrates them:

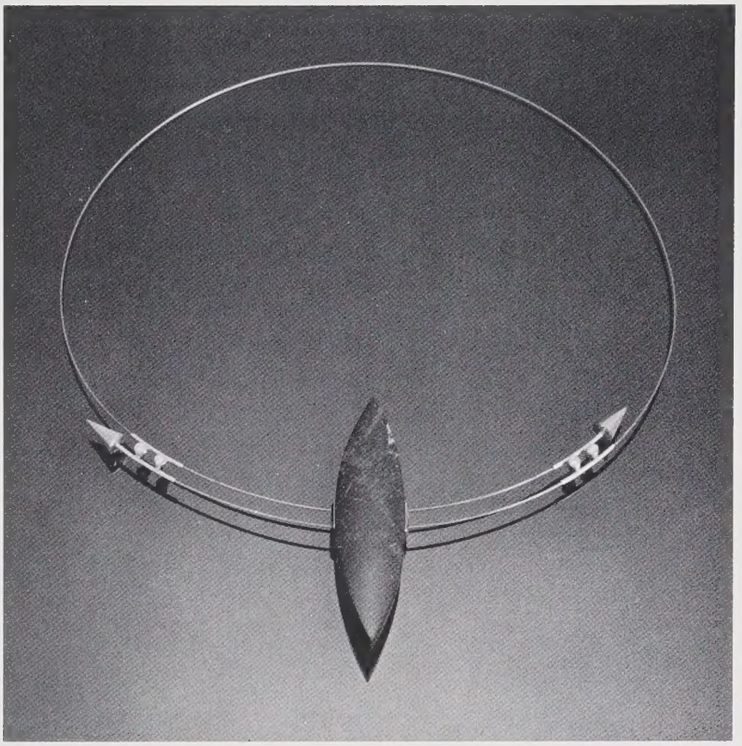
*The touchstone cools*
*The hand that warms it, and*
*Brings the mind to know the now.*

The haiku and pieces work as well as they do because they are a product of her deeply integrated Zen philosophy. An artist who has lived by a river a good part of her life, Adell has created a series of gold, silver and copper "pebbles," many set with diamonds and pearls and engraved with her own haiku, that have the energy of stones recently tumbled ashore. As modular work, the stones can be strung interchangeably on her neckrings, multipins, chains and earrings of gold, silver and stainless steel.

Haiku and jewelry is a brilliant theme that could not have come off without the unique sensitivity of the artists and likewise the support of the gallery. The profound simplicity of the display itself – sparingly placed dry flowers, carefully arranged stones and jewelry on bare branches – rendered a haiku tranquility, an inspiration to go home and write haiku.

*Anne Crowley Tom is a freelance writer based in Manhattan.*





# *C. James Meyer*

Susan Cummins Gallery, Mill Valley, CA
January 7 – February 2, 1991

by Roberta Floden

**ABOVE LEFT,** *Brooch* and **ABOVE,** *Neckpiece*
sterling silver, 14k gold, 5 x .5 x .5" (brooch), 1989
Photos: Taylor Dabney

Although the jewelry of C. James Meyer may seem rather conventional at first glance, upon closer inspection his conservative attitude toward expensive materials and economical designs reveals itself to be an understated contemporary expression. As Meyer says, "For me to reject the history and traditions of jewelry would leave me in a void. Instead, I wish to define jewelry's traditions and redefine society's accepted notions of jewelry in the effort to push jewelry forward."

Meyer derives the unique character of his jewelry from techniques and designs based upon the properties of steel wire. In one pair of triangular earrings, for example, each earring consists of a length of rounded steel passing through the pierced ear and then bent sharply so that the wire can be placed through a horizontal gold tube that forms the base of the earring. Though structurally strong, these earrings appear delicate and feminine. And, like all of Meyer's jewelry, they are practically impossible to lose.

Meyer's necklaces take steel wire even further. In these pieces, the wire is bent curvilinearly, then slipped over the head and allowed to assume its ultimate shape as it encircles the neck. Again, the steel is held in place by one, sometimes two, gold tubes often embedded with diamonds.

These circles of wire are punctuated by pendants not only of semiprecious stones – rose quartz, garnet, tourmaline and opal – but of highly polished marble and granite as well. They are frequently embedded in gold bezels. The subdued colors play against the opacity and transparency of the stones, as well as with the gold and diamond tubes.

The necklaces are engineered so that the rod-within-a-tube construction allows for a certain amount of movement: the wire can be manipulated by the wearer to change the necklace configuration for dramatic effect. Because of this, the wearer is challenged to somewhat alter the design to suit the occasion.

Meyer's brooches – large, oversized pins – emphasize elemental, geometric shapes. Again, steel is the primary element, carrying gold and silver circles, cones and triangles, and stones. When worn, the brooches come alive: you can't see the wire, only what the wire is connecting.

His rings, on the other hand, though basic, gain effect through the enrichment of surfaces with ornamental detail such as pink and white gold inlaid into high-carat yellow-gold. They too are concerned with geometry, based on the circle (fitting the finger) within a square, upon which a stone might be set under or over gold. In other words, a ring might look square, but it feels and fits round.

Restraint and lack of excess are Meyer's signature. If there are expressions of exuberance, they show themselves in the jewels, the rich patinas and the highly polished, technically sophisticated surfaces. Visual interest is garnered primarily through shifts of focus created by the tension of the moveable curved wires; through contrasting forms of cones, triangles, ovals and circles; through the exploitation of the innate qualities of the gray-toned steel; through the use of precious and semiprecious metals and stones, and the juxtaposition of the softness of marble and opals against the gleaming gold and diamonds; and through the variety of textures and reflections created by light playing on these elements.

Meyer's work breaches the staleness of conventions by its fluidity, its use of disparate materials and its intensely graceful, visually balanced designs. The hand of the craftsperson is always evident, and the history and function of jewelry are never denied. Instead, Meyer carries tradition forward with respect, illustrating a love for the craft and for its materials.

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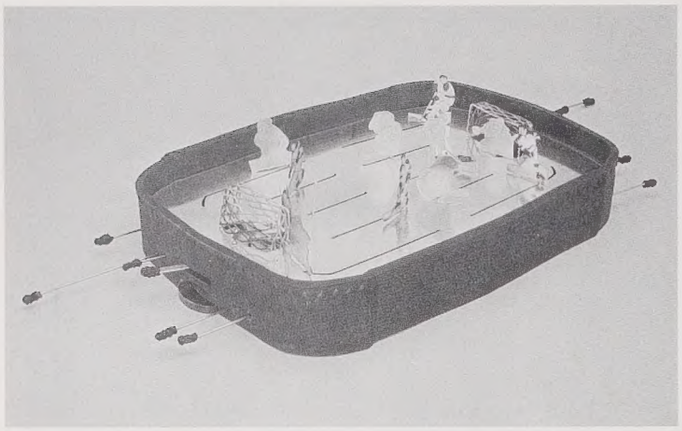
*Roberta Floden is a Marin County, CA, artist and theater critic.*



*Hockey Game #2*
silver, copper, brass, steel, marriage of metals,
constructed, ceramic walls made by Greg Sloane,
31 x 17.5", men 3" h., 1990

## *Mel Wolski: "My Big True North"*

Kensington Silver Studio, Toronto, Ontario
November 30 – December 24, 1990

by John MacAdam

Using icons of everyday Canadian life, automobiles, houses and hockey, Mel Wolski reveals an intensely felt sensibility encompassing both humor and satire. A collection of pins, exhibited within a converted television set, are fabricated in marriage of metals (silver, copper, brass). They feature a series of suburban landscapes – car, house, and tree – with each element seen in profile, the archetype of suburban living; the pin, a badge of middle-class values. Unique among these is a brooch depicting an escapee from the nondescript, emerging with a fiendish intent to press the line between the predictable norm and his own turf.

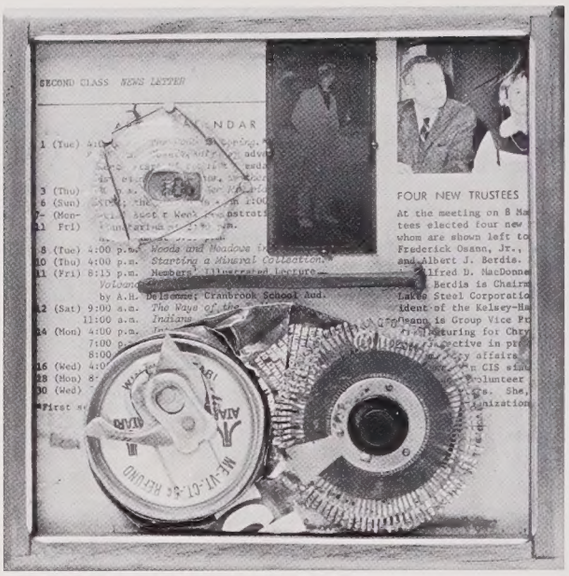
A similar motif appears in a pair of remarkable cylindrical, stemmed drinking cups, documenting in marriage of metals, a round of drudges found toiling on the underside of the cup bases. Each cup is differentiated from the other by either an X or an O, featured in the surface design. Though one cup may be chosen consistently over the other by the viewer, one has chosen only one's own version of the same weary story.

Two major pieces, *Hockey game 1* and *2* recreate Canada's national pastime in miniature, mechanical, working models, reminiscent of childhood tabletop–hockey games. More than a game, these metal sculptures compel the viewer to examine and choose roles as player–observers in the complex interrelationships that aggressive, defensive, competitive situations demand. The viewer is compelled to mentally "play the game" as a visually intense experience. Likewise *Winger*, a large wall plaque featuring a sliding hockey player, challenges the viewer to "put one past him."

Wolski has extended the utility of a silver honey pot, an intricate container for condoms and an open rectangular box in *Something for Honey (Love = distance/time)*, unifying each element to achieve a successful personal statement on the vagaries of long distance romance.

*My Big True North* represented a body of work consistently tart and assertive, establishing a direct and challengingly playful interaction with the viewer.

*John MacAdam enjoys the privilege of being a collector of fine art.*




## *J. Fred Woell*
## *Mixed Media Sculpture 1967 - 1990*

Wheeler Seidel Gallery, New York City
November, 1990

by Jamie Bennett

Given the scope and the nature of this exhibition, it would be more appropriate in a museum than a gallery. The sculptural works spanning a quarter–of–a–century are crowded in the available space, undermining the individual spirit of many. One is also quickly frustrated in attempting to understand the sequential relationship of the works when none are given dates. What this exhibition does offer, however, is a unique opportunity to examine Woell's sculptural explorations, which are less celebrated than his jewelry from the mid-60s and 70s. These sculptural tableaux and constructions are divided into three phases: the earliest cast bronze and epoxy reliefs and sculptures dating from the mid-60s; a group of almost 40 miniature bronze-castings from the 70s; and mixed-media assemblages from the early 80s.

Although there are formal shifts in Woell's work, there remains at its heart a vision of his America with its ironies and misguided values. Much of Woell's world is set into compact works, and through his sardonic style and skeptical humor he examines its incongruities. Woell's persistence in exploring the darker side of the human condition is found early on – *Things Go Better With Coke* (1969), a crucifix, where an epoxy Christ rests on an inverted cross whose cross member is made up, in part, by two worn Coke cans. This is an enduring and powerful work whose message is none too subtle. *Jesus Saves Everything, Part II* (1967) suggests the degradation of public trust by our institutions.

**LEFT**
*Time Goes, You Say, Alas; Time Stays, We Go*
mixed media wall panel, 8 x 8 x 1.25", 1983

**RIGHT**
*Goosed*
box with sculpture lid, bronze, 3.75 x 2.5"
Photo: Bobby Hanson

**FAR RIGHT**
*Things Go Better with Coke Crucifix*
epoxy, wood, metal, 44 x 16.25, 1969

Woell has used any number of maxims as titles. They play on the original meaning, further intensifying the sculpture's content. He paraphrases Shakespeare in *Much To Do About Nothing* (1985), offers platitudes and Americanisms – *Cycle For Your Health* (1973), *Be Prepared* (1974), *Was The West Really Won* (1983). He goes on with manipulated mottos, homily, and advertising slogans. These titling devices tend to reinforce the social commentary of Woell's thinking and exemplify what at times is his bitter anger. The work from the early 70s is perhaps the angriest, the majority of which relate to the Vietnam war and the declining American spirit. Consider these miniature tableau as allegorical portraits and references to glory. Woell uses the traditional means of glorifying war and the warrior, the bronze statue. He disrupts the sanctity of war as an occasion for glory as well as the statue as a glorifying and legitimatizing device. One could challenge or subjectify the role of the miniature in these works as either undermining the power of size or utilizing the power of scale. There is no question, however, that the ornamental and ordinary jewelry boxes incorporated into many of these pieces, as replacements of the statue's pedestal, add a poignant counterpoint and esthetic irony to the celebration of the war trophy. In works such as *Goosed* (1972), *10–4* (1974), *Stop the War I Want To Get Married* (1974), *Cockfighters* (1972), *How the West Was Won* (1975) and *A Day In The Life Of Everyman* (1975), we find at times grotesque constructs appearing in many incarnations. Where an arm should be, there is a M–16 rifle pointing from the shoulder; from the crotch of a soldier emerges a defiant arm with a clenched fist; from the neck of a seated figure, a newly wed couple sprouts. Woell's portrayal of everyman is not a flattering one. Works from this period are not all topical, exploring an expanded emotional range. Consistently, however, Woell is addressing his relationship to America. *Just Another Day In The USA* (1975), *Down On The Farm The Chickens Ask For You* (1975) and *Requiem To A Lukewarm Lover* (1982) offer various scenes of pathos and Woell's private protest.

Although the passion for social commentary persists into the 80s, there is an overriding mood that is far more self-reflective than angry. A group of works entitled *Back to Square One*, which are all 8" x 8" wall panels, are not only of a more personal and biographical exploration, but also more formally exact and elegant. They appear to be archival objects and assemblages. *Back to Square One* has as much to do with the relationship of an artist to himself as that of art with society. *Time Goes You Say? Ah No! Alas, Time Stays, We Go!, Nonesuch Person /The Male in Midlife, Art in America, Circa 1960s, Western Veneer* and *Urban Landscape*, all from 1983–85, seem to use slogans less as cries and more as inquiries. These small constructions represent a movement from a sculptural context to a pictorial format, yet they remain very physical, and one clearly gets a sense of Woell's poetic and political interest in materials and cast offs (many of these pieces deal with environmental issues) as resonant images. The best of these works are succinct messages, clear and articulately rendered. Those that tend to be introspective and self-searching do not reach out as strongly and tend to be marred by sentimental pitfalls.

What one realizes from this show is Woell's ability to capture the moment in America and in the case of *Back to Square One*, his own moment to rekindle his relationship with art and being an artist.

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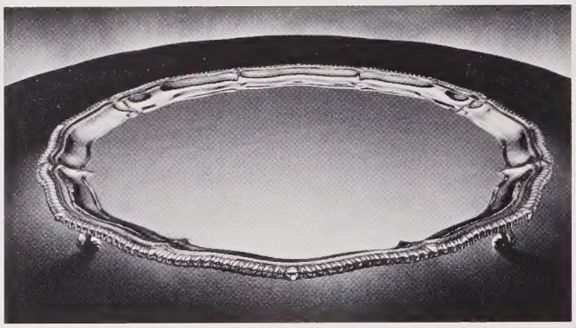
*Jamie Bennett is an enamelist and professor at SUNY, New Paltz, NY.*



Preston Jones, Jr., *Footed Salver*
sterling silver, 12" d., 1990
Photo: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation
Final project during apprenticeship
at Colonial Williamsburg, VA

Harold Schremmer, *Chalice*
sterling silver, 1990. Photo: Dick Arling

# *Reflections of the Past and Present Contemporary American Silver*

The premier exhibition
of the Society of American Silversmiths
The Society of Arts and Crafts, Boston, MA
September 6 – November 9, 1990

by Curtis K. LaFollette

It is perhaps fitting that America's newest metalworking organization – a trade association rather than nonprofit – The Society of American Silversmiths (S of AS) should deliver its premier exhibition through America's oldest arts and crafts showroom, The Society of Arts and Crafts in Boston. Catalog notes were prepared by Edward S.Cooke, Jr., associate curator of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The exhibition reflected almost the entire history of American silver, from reproductions of 18th–century ware by James Curtis of Williamsburg to geometric teapots by Susan Ewing. There was work by Rob Butler who is not college trained and by Fred Fenster who is. There was corporate executive paraphernalia by Harold Schremmer and table sculpture by Heikki Seppä. The list could go on and on. In fact this is a totally eclectic survey of the artisan membership of S of AS, including 60 pieces, produced by 29 of the society's 46 artisan members. This membership category is juried and artisan status is conferred by Jeffery Herman, Harold Schremmer and Michael Brophy. Only artisan members are included in society-sponsored exhibitions. Herman is also the founder of the organization and publisher of its brief, but tasteful, quarterly *Journal.* There are 68 additional members in supporting and associate categories.

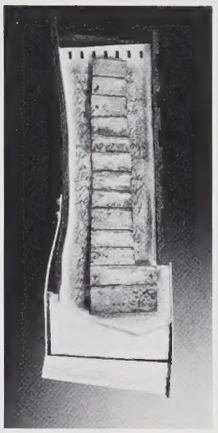
Jeffery Herman discovered his interest in silversmithing when, at 16 years old on a summer trip to Cape Cod, he met Neil Turkelsen in his studio/salesroom and was spellbound. He immediately took continuing education courses at Southern Massachusetts University, and worked his way through the Portland School of Art in Maine selling silver jewelry he had fabricated at home to earn a BFA degree. He studied with Tommy Thompson for two years and with Harold Schremmer. Since 1984 he has maintained his own business – a sole proprietorship primarily directed toward antique silver restoration and allied services.

The society does not take any position on esthetic issues. It is focused on craftsmanship and technical competence. S of AS is an umbrella organization equally dedicated to the promotion of its members and the recruitment of students to the profession. It is apparently, quoting Herman, "the only such organization exclusively for silversmithing." Services include trade discounts, advertising discounts, referrals, networking, exhibitions and the *Quarterly.* For students there are additional potential benefits, including advice on technical matters and personal presentation.

Herman is especially concerned that the median age of the society's artisan members is 51. He attributes this in part to design schools that have not adequately addressed the structural needs of scheduling for technically complex procedures. He prefers the European model where there is greater specialization. In most American design schools the training is watered down. You almost never see the finesse in handling hinged lids and other difficult techniques in contemporary American metal that was commonplace in the 19th century. In Europe, students can still specialize in boilerplate chasing, repoussé or engraving, whereas here, if specialities are taught at all, they are peripheral, complementing raising or forging, but not an end in themselves. Herman would also like to see more attention paid to other difficult skills, box making, for example, or vessel faceting. It would also be useful for students to have a greater exposure to early silver, both from the standpoint of restoration and just to observe how things were put together. The foundation of silversmithing in this view is technical virtuosity rather than intellectual analysis.

*Curtis K. LaFollette is a professor of art at Rhode Island College in Providence.*

Rachelle Thiewes
*Silent Dance Series*, 30 x 40", 1990

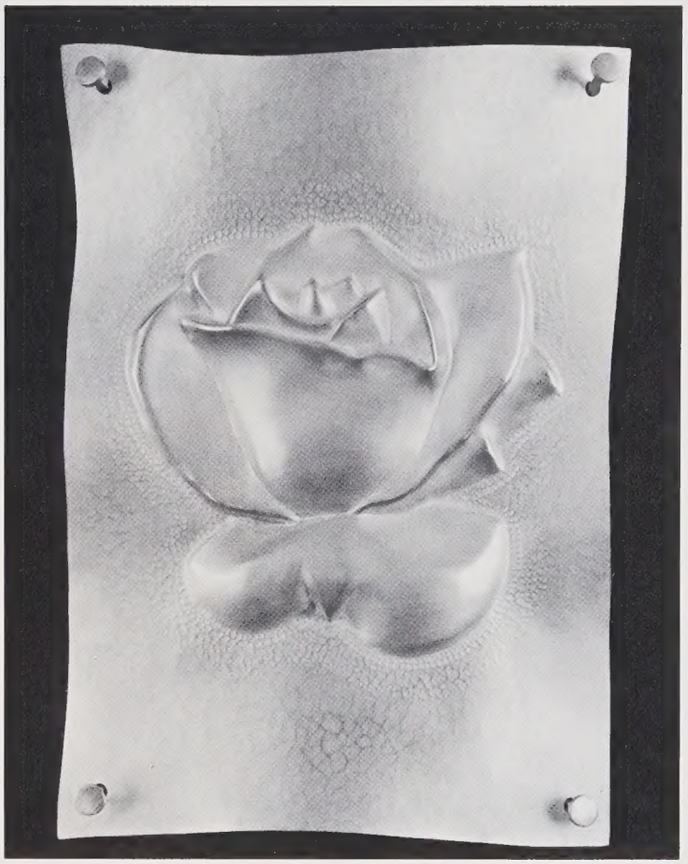


Bevery Penn, *Terraza* brooch
silver, copper, nickel, 5 x 1.5", 1990

# *Sculpture to Wear*

Adair Margo Gallery
El Paso, TX
November 2, 1990 – January 18, 1991

by Frank C. Lewis



Kate Wagle, *Rose (Images of Perfection)*
sterling silver, 6 x 4 x 3/8", 1990

Seldom has the spirit of the baroque been so alive in recent art as it now seems to be in the field of jewelry. I am speaking not so much of that aspect of the baroque that is crowded and filled to the breaking point with layers-upon-layers of material but more the intellectual dimension that challenges conventional genres and also embraces complex ideas, theatricality, representation, humor and even caprice. Like a maquette by Bernini, the work featured at Adair Margo's "Sculpture to Wear" exhibition would seem to have fared as well as a part of a stage performance or, if situated in the landscape, as an architectural conceit, yet in their comfortable human scale the pieces demanded a familiarity and closeness denied by architecture and the theater.

For instance, the importance of the musical aspects of jewelry was sensitively demonstrated by the jingling units of Rachelle Thiewes' bracelets and necklaces and the twisting rhythms of Joyce Scott's elaborate beadwork. Architectural fragments were brought to mind by the spare, southern Mediterranean colors of Beverly Penn's miniature walls, windows and doors, while William Harper's rich enamels suggested the interior of a Pasha's palace or the elaborateness of an Ottoman manuscript illumination. Kate Wagle's *Image of Perfection* stated with elegance and directness that permanence and mutability, solidity and fragility are often found in the same moment and substance.

While each piece clearly functioned individually, none of the artists were satisfied with only the creation of a hermetic work. All five referenced something outside of simple material manipulation and esthetic form. Thus the resonances of the imagination added to the inherent richness of the traditional physical elements of wearable art. Penn's combination of polished and patinaed copper were three-dimensional duotone sketches of the sights she witnessed on a recent trip to Spain. Joyce Scott's caricatures of various types of people, *Married* and *Moslem Couple*, and her comic earrings and necklaces combined the colors of juju fruit candies and costume jewelry into mini-narratives about human relationships and internal psychological struggles.

Harper's cloissonné enamels captured the images in a child's dreams after having heard the stores of 1001 Arabian nights: dazzling snakes and the brilliant striations of exotic mountains, all contained in a palm-sized brooch or a sword-shaped pin. Rachelle Thiewes chose to display her *Silent Dance Series*, on life-sized photographs of models to remind viewers of the importance of movement and physical interaction, which much contemporary metalwork demands.

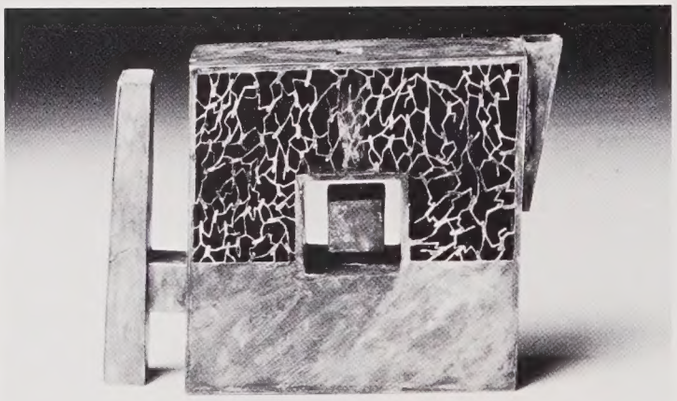
Kate Wagle created the most confrontational piece with her metal "installation." A framed sheet of gold and images of a rose, a diamond, a cocoonlike pod, an acorn and a diving figure stamped in silver and pinned to the wall created an odd, yet intriguing visual poem. Its anti-traditionalism posited questions that played an interesting counterpoint to the other works in the exhibition.

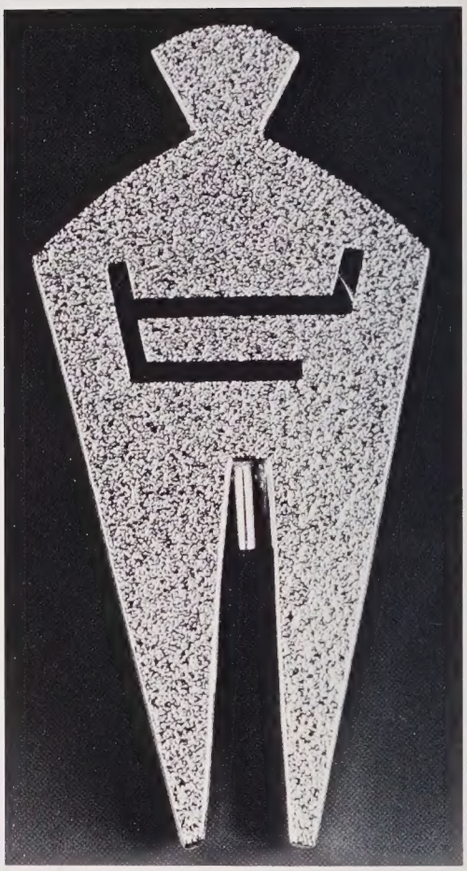
"Sculpture to Wear" affirms much of the recent critical discussion concerning the breakdown of the traditional separation between painting, sculpture, metalwork, performance, et. al. The five artists included in the roster of "Sculpture to Wear", like the artists who preceded the modern period, seem to know that an object is not always only an occasion for formal analysis, often it is only the beginning of long and meandering consideration of the richness of image, substance and the imagination.

*Frank C. Lewis is a critic and art historian living in Milwaukee, WI.*

**RIGHT**
Michael Buehl, *Teapot*
copper, fabricated

**FAR RIGHT**
Nancy Slagle, *Male Brooch*
sterling silver, faricated





# *1990 Metals Invitational Exhibition*

Haynes Fine Arts Gallery
Montana State University, Bozeman, MT
September 10 – October 19, 1990

by Ken Bova

It was one of my favorite places, filled with anything anyone who worked with their hands would want. There were 40–foot aisles filled with electrical parts, hand tools, gloves and garden supplies, boots and brass widgets. There were some strange things in those aisles. Standing in front of a bin of odd-looking brass and steel contraptions with moveable parts and springs, I once found myself thinking: What is this? Is it a tool or a part for something else? Out on North 7th Avenue in Bozeman, Montana, Quality Wholesale was the quintessential hardware store. It had a lot of something for everyone, and it was fascinating, delightful and bewildering.

Group metalsmithing shows are a little like that. At Montana State University's Haynes Fine Art Gallery, about 15 blocks south of where Quality Wholesale used to be, the 1990 Metals Invitational Exhibition was held last fall. Featuring the work of 13 artists, it had a little something for everyone, and it, too, was, by turns, fascinating, delightful and bewildering.

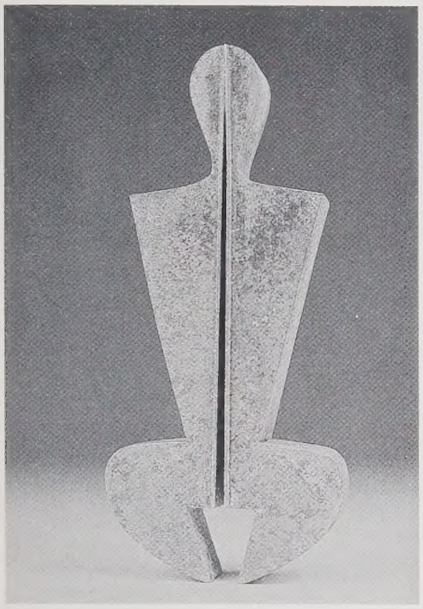
Bewildering were the comments on the first day after the show opened: "What's some of this stuff got to do with metalsmithing?" and, "I don't get it. Is it supposed to be jewelry or sculpture?" Sound familiar? Like the brass doodah in the hardware store, group shows sometimes present us with objects that are strange or confusing, objects that seem at once familiar and unknown. They provoke us into wondering and speculation. Perhaps it is because the artists themselves are wondering and speculating. Whatever the reason, this show had its share of mixed-media sculptural work that bore little if any visual heritage to traditional metalsmithing. Likewise, there was "jewelry" that was so huge and cumbersome that the thought of actually wearing it caused self-conscious grins.

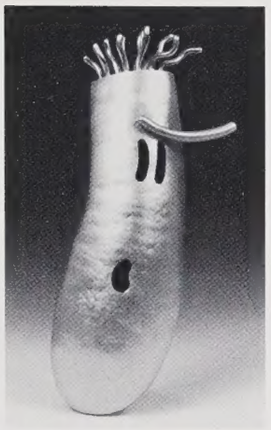
It was not, however, only function and content that viewers responded to, but process and technique – how did they do that – as well. It was in this area that the exhibit provided fascination and delight. On display were functional and nonfunctional holloware pieces that demonstrated a sense of form, sensitivity to materials and a technical skill that, put simply, made them a pleasure to look at. There was jewelry that did the same thing; it was both wearable and visually exciting.

Was it jewelry or sculpture? What did this have to do with "metalsmithing?" Just how did the artist do that? These are perhaps the sort of questions curator and exhibition organizer Richard Helzer was eliciting. As head of the Metalsmithing and Jewelry Department of M.S.U.'s School of Art, and a long-time arts educator, Helzer knows the value of the questioning process. The exhibit was organized in part for the university audience, i.e., metalsmithing students. As a consequence, the diversity of work shown was no accident. It was designed to technically, visually and conceptually educate.

That brass and spring thingamajig in the hardware store wasn't a tool but an irrigation–system component that regulated water flow. (I finally figured it out, with a little help from a store clerk.) Like Quality Wholesale, the 1990 Metals Invitational Exhibition contained plenty to look at. And like that hardware store, it provided the opportunity to stand there, look and ask questions, to be fascinated, delighted and bewildered.

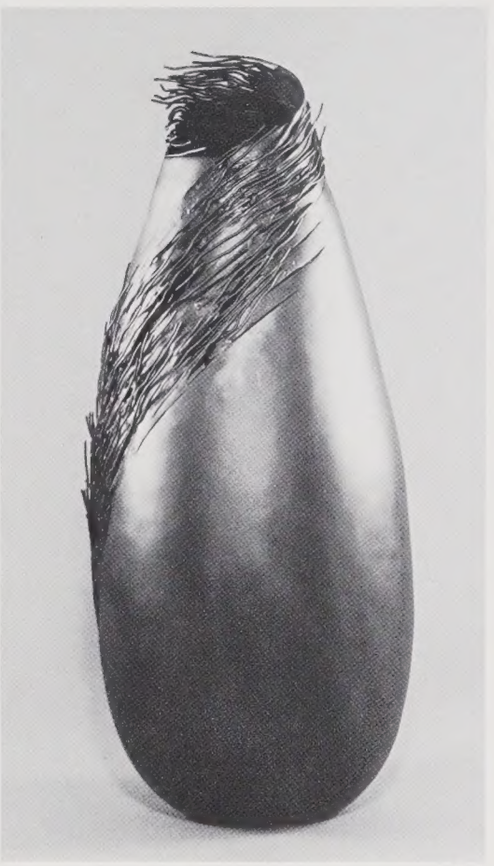
*Ken Bova is a jeweler living in Bozeman.*





**FAR LEFT**
Robly A. Glover, Jr.,
*Venus of the Furrow*
brass, patina, 7.5 x 3.5 x 1"

**LEFT**
Keith A. Lewis
*Angry Face*
sterling silver
18k gold laminate, 2 x 1"



Michael Tom, *The Grass of May*
copper, 14 x 6 x 6"

# *National Metals Invitational*

Galeria Mesa, Mesa, AZ
November 16 – December 15, 1990

by Barbara Cortright

First impressions: the exhibitors appeared serious about their work and their level of imagination and technique were uniformly high. Curator Jeffory Morris achieved his aim of mixing work by recent graduates – something like 40% of those exhibiting – and established artists with no feeling of "master and student." Overall, there was an emphasis on sculptural qualities, and a meditative aspect that is an apparent characteristic of this next generation.

For example, a totally freewheeling object, *Zumb*, by Lee Boroson, which seems wonderfully organic, curled in its case like an overgrown leek with an astonishing, burgeoning, mushroomlike head. Made of copper, aluminum and lead, which exuded a gray-green and, of course, ochre, it shouted of vegetation and the earth. As in Surrealism, paradox, where nonorganic materials that are immutable to time are used to convey the all too mutable cycle of growth, sharpens the sense of both.

A similar theme, very differently expressed, lies beneath *Replacing Nature: Tea and Sympathy* by Robert Farrell. Here, a teapot with severe precision lines had, on its base, a delicate frieze of irises inlaid in metal. Materials were sterling silver, copper, bran nickel and 18-karat gold. One thinks here of Yeats and the lines, "Once out of nature I shall never take my bodily form from any natural thing, but such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make of hammered gold and gold enameling."

Then there was the elegant and simple *Grass of May*, an elongated copper pot encircled with a diagonal strand of copper "grass." A statement completed in few words by Michael Tom. Words were featured in the abstract, contemplative piece, *Ten Bulls in a Quantum Field: Scene #5*, by Harlan W. Butt. The quality of metal shines through in classic fashion, contrasting natural copper with color variations of red, yellow, bronze, shaded and textured with equally subtle spatial dynamics. The contrast between the implied physical sensations and the impersonal universality of the abstract form creates the tension.

*Venus of the Furrow* by Robly Glover is reminiscent both of Cycladic idols and Judy Chicago. In terms of expressing woman's fertility and the literal cleavage of childbirth it outdoes Judy and reaches back with some distinction to the Isles of Greece. Neat, brief, expressive, with its knife cleft down the middle of the goddess, Glover's piece, like other famous Venuses, might be enclosed in one's hand.

Completing the noteworthy entries was Keith A. Lewis's humorous *Angry Face* and three sculpturally impressive knives by Peter Jagoda. In short, an exhibition with range and depth, an exciting presage of things to come.

*Barbara Cortright writes about art in the Southwest.*

Marian Slepian, *Opera VIII: Il Tovata*
fine silver, cloisonne enamel

Marilyn Druin, *Vessel*
fine silver, cloisonne enamel, 3.5"

Marilyn Druin, *Neckpiece*
fine and sterling silver, topaz, amber glass, cloisonne enamel

# *The Enamel Guild of New Jersey*

The Newark Museum, Newark, NJ
January 13 – March 3, 1991

by Antonia Schwed

Under the aegis of Ulysses Dietz, decorative arts curator, the skillful display of the Guild's work, featuring five enamelists with six pieces each, seemed to underline the parenthetical comment made by Thomas Hoving in the December issue of *Connoisseur* magazine, where he refers to crafts as being "now equal in importance to the so–called fine arts."

Marilyn Druin, a cloisonné artist, had delicately crafted brooches that seemed to me right out of the Roman Empire. Her necklace with elaborate cloisonné beads is the kind of work you want to pick up and study from every angle. In addition, she exhibited three hand–raised little vessels, beautifully enameled with cloisonné details and cutout areas.

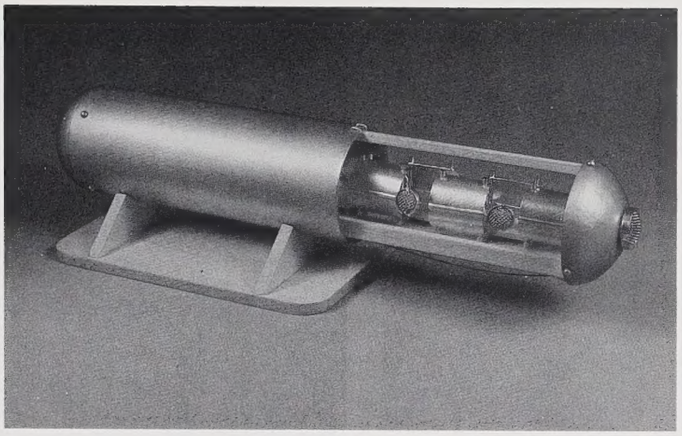
Peg Miller has come up with bowls in brilliant transparent colors combined with areas of firescale and opaque enamel. Two of the bowls exhibited have been cut and shaped, a technique that combines with the swirling colors to create a lovely wavelike quality.

Marian Slepian, that master of the "cloisonné painting" had six pictures hung along one wall. If her enamels were purely enamel painting they would be outstanding, but when you add to the painted quality her elaborate cloisonné outlines, the result is truly stunning. To me, one of the problems of cloisonné has always been a sort of tightness, a constraining quality, but Slepian overcomes this completely and her cloisonné lines flow almost as if done with a brush. Her opera painting combines high drama with great colors. A larger picture, entitled "Pedestrian," I also thought particularly evocative.

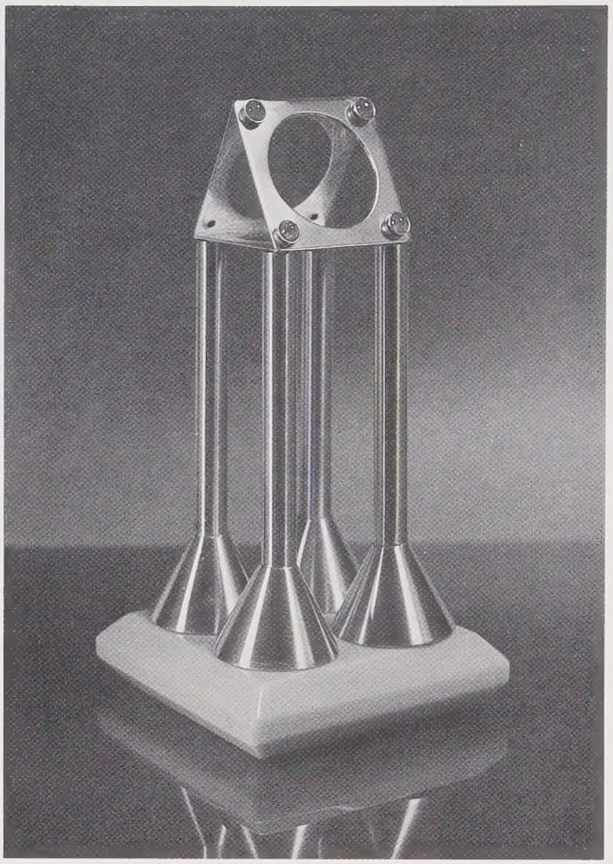
Katharine Wood had a dynamic range of work. In her display case there is an enamel mask with movable eyes, staring out from a small crate. Also, there are two, small, dazzling champlevé pictures, sort of Jungian portraits of two figures, each with a background that is a mystical melage of animals and trees. They are called *Chac I* and *Chac II*, referring to the ancient rain god of Mexico. On one side of her case is a collage–wall-hanging, representing a dramatic new line of work by Wood in which she combines enamel pieces with black wood–forms that give a sculptural quality to the work.

In all, this exhibit was a great boost for modern enameling. Too long misunderstood and overlooked, often deemed a medium to be used in summer camp for a hobby, in reality enamel is one of the most exacting and beautiful media. As a medium it is indeed technically perverse and difficult, but in this exhibit it is being successfully used for the expression of artistic conceptions. The artist dedicated to enamel as his/her medium can be encouraged by and proud of the exhibit at the Newark Museum.

*Antonia Schwed is an enamelist living in New York City.*



*Bracelet with Box*
copper, basswood, 6 x 4 x 3"



*Ring with Stand*
brass, garnets, 5"h.

# *Christopher Darway*

Morris Museum, Morristown, NJ
November 11, 1990 – January 6, 1991

by Patricia Malarcher

Christopher Darway's solo exhibition opened a window on the workings of a problem-solving mind. The 35 pieces, a combination of jewelry and sculpture, projected the cool, classic clarity of works in which design ra-ther than expressiveness is the prime determinant. However, this was tempered, sometimes contradicted, by the warmth of a playful intelligence.

Darway is a master of materials and skills related to auto shops and hangars as well as metal studios. Working with an even-handed treatment of fine metals and industrial components – for example, rubber O-rings, wire mesh, plastic tubing, aircraft cable – he produced the works on view within the past two years. His confidence in shifting from gold to plywood, to foam to paper and beyond, as well as his use of processes such as riveting that are unusual in jewelry, reflect his training in industrial arts. He is also a master of invention who exploits, with obvious delight, the permutations of design elements and their adaptation to function. This approach to design informs his work with its own personality.

Although this show is relatively small for a jewelry presentation, it is replete with ideas. Every form suggests the answer to a problem and prompts the viewer to examine it from different perspectives. Many designs have subtle overlays of reference. For instance, a flexible "2-dot bracelet," a multiplied module of tiny connected discs, looks like a chain of molecules. Much of Darway's work calls attention to the relationship of geometric and organic form.

In the simplest bracelets of linear circles, squares and triangles – their structure recalls cookie cutters – there is a seamless fusion of functional necessity and esthetic value. Unobtrusively hinged, their walls are held together at the openings by Velcro-covered flanges. The line of black created by the Velcro at the juncture provides the one critical relief from the smooth austerity of brushed sterling.

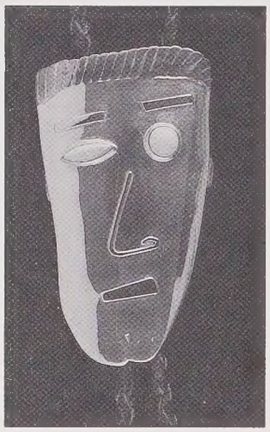
While those and another group of bracelets in sterling and foam cord were pared to the minimum, some pieces were designed to be integrated into sculptural environments when not being worn. For instance, a three-sided ring – it was shaped like an "A-frame – became a pitched "roof" atop a stand built of columns. A slim gold choker, unclasped and opened, was displayed on a base as a lyrical line that engaged the separated sections of the clasp as points of tension. For storage, a segmented fold-formed bracelet was accompanied by a rocket-shaped container with a drawer. This changed the normally four-cornered bracelet into a train, reminiscent of a child's toy, of convex gold forms with intricate hemispheres of wire screen as couplings.

Darway's penchant for formal alterations was most fully demonstrated in a group of five objects, each in a different material and scale, in which an S-shaped curve was the organizing principle. This unit, repeated, snaked horizontally into a cold-enameled sterling pin; in a bronze table sculpture it was broken down and stacked; in the largest piece, it was translated into a skeleton of balsa wood supporting a paperish "silkspan" shell, constructed like a model airplane.

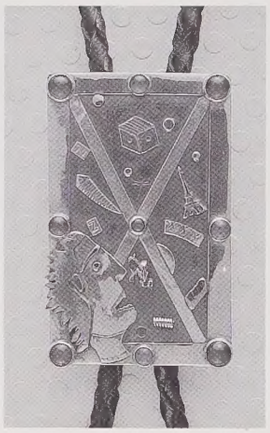
At this museum site, it was appropriate that the work be displayed with an emphasis on form rather than function. However, a few pieces, such as the triangular ring, invited me to wonder how they mesh with human form.

While the exhibition observed Darway's 1990 craft fellowship awarded by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts together with his nomination as a Distinguished Artist of New Jersey, it was but a teasing sample of his work. Beyond his versatility with materials and his finely tuned sense of design, Darway has proven elsewhere his ability to carry an idea from miniature to monumental scale with all the needed adjustments. The series based on the "S" curve alluded to this, but seemed rather like an exercise. The lobby of the Morris Museum was inadequate for a full-scale presentation of his work, but one could hope that such an exhibition lies ahead.

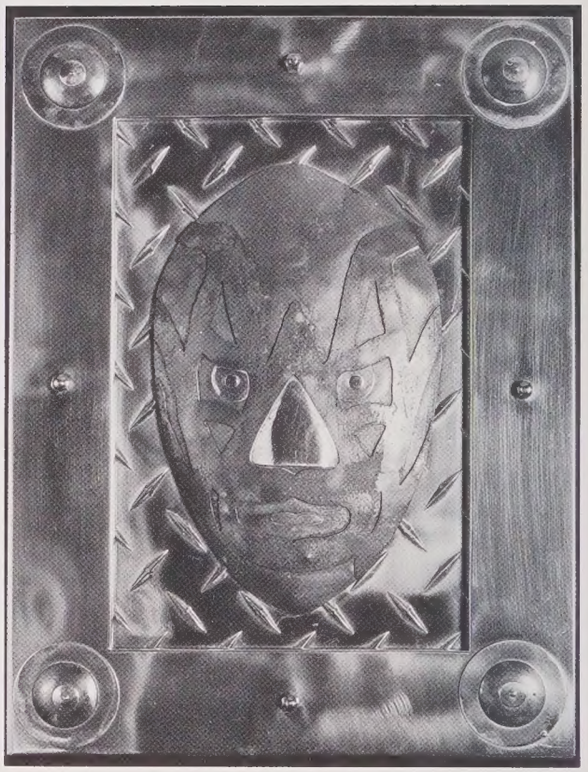
*Patricia Malarcher is a fiber artist and craft critic.*



*Pin*, lapis lazuli eyes



*Bolo*, metal stamping



*Rey Misterio* wall plaque
10.75 x 14", 1990

# *William Strasser*

Viewpoint Gallery, Carmel, CA
Fall 1990

by Anne Telford

Jeweler William "Willy" Strasser is an original as his comical yet thought-provoking creations. The native Californian works out of a vintage Airstream trailer parked behind his modest Santa Cruz house. The studded metallic interior is chockablock with the materials Strasser uses for his jewelry and the visual references that inspire his work. Since 1973 he has been making very modern jewelry, often based on ancient symbols. His layered pins, earrings and bolo ties combine elements of Oceanic art with tropical symbols, Cubist references, skulls inspired by Mexican *dia de los muertos* (day of the dead) ceremonies and the raw, vigorous style Picasso cultivated after his trips to Africa. They often feature striking, primitive faces.

His pieces are constructed of semiprecious, nonferrous metals – silver, brass, copper and occasionally gold, although its cost prohibits wider use. "All my jewelry has combinations of different metals as far as my palette goes," Strasser explains. "I use the metals as colors and the colors are used in contrasting fashions to make the features come out or go back in, and for the color of the hair." He prefers the look of oxidized copper to copper sprayed with plastic to prevent the surface from being marked by fingerprints. He says of this favored metal, "It's really unstable in the polished form but let it oxidize and it has this impervious, kind of unchangeable patina."

Strasser doesn't get bogged down in the "is-it-fine-art?" school of jewelry making. He feels some jewelers lose sight of the end result when they try to "make their jewelry to be more like art," ending up with necklaces that resemble breastplates. Although he will occasionally make pieces "that are more on the statement side" for models or clients who wish a dramatic piece, he keeps his jewelry functional as well as decorative.

For this, his first one-man show, Strasser spent six weeks creating a group of wall plaques that took his jewelry concept several steps farther. He used drawings from a Mexican magazine that dealt with drug addictions as inspiration for some of these larger-scale pieces that ranged from jewelry-size to 1½ feet by 2 feet. "There was something really absurd about it and kind of misinformed. It struck me as being really funny but yet at the same time it was an anti-drug statement," Strasser explains. One plaque depicts a man with a crazed expression looking at a jar of LSD he is holding; underneath this image are the words *una droga terrible* (a terrible drug). Wrestlers, suggested by *lucha libre* (free wrestling) magazines he buys in Watsonville are the subject of several plaques. The masked images are fierce, compelling and imbued with Strasser's unique sense of humor. He points to one: "This guy is Alcatraz, the prisoner. He's got jail bars on his eyes." All the plaques bear funny titles such as *The Doggie Expo*, decorated with stampings of poodles; *Johnny Blaze Meets the Tiki God*, based on a comic book character who transforms Hulk-style into a blazing skull; and *Willy's Novelty Company*, a name he's created for a fantasy roadside attraction store.

Strasser's shapes are sensual and organic; his long totemic heads with overlaid and etched features have a timeless appeal. He often incorporates commercial metal stampings into his work. "I've tried to take the stamping thing to the limit," he says. "Everybody can go in a buy stampings. You can get really tired of looking at just a plain old guitar or some chickens or fish." In Strasser's hands they are anything but plain. His own twisted genius combines wildly disparate stampings into metal comic book strips. Indians dive into kidney-shaped swimming pools, Jesus is mock-crucified by guitars, surfers hang ten through a cosmic landscape of saws and crosses and one series depicts a headless surfer shooting through a conceptual circular "tube." It's natural for Strasser to include surfers in his circus of characters. He's been an avid surf enthusiast for years; it's a way to unwind from the hours of meticulous detail work.

Once he arrives at a theme he will do a number of variations on it. He has no lack of ideas and he enjoys embellishing an existing design.

Although Strasser has an associate of arts degree from a California junior college, he is largely self-taught. He constantly pushes the boundaries of both his craft and his subject matter. The world is full of iconic images; television news reports produced a series of screaming faces pins and elements of contemporary culture, here and abroad, continue to provide inspiration. And while Strasser considers his work to be whimsical and light-hearted, it is also a metaphorical statement on life in the 90s.

*Anne Telford is a writer living in San Francisco*

# Books

"Bones" pages
from Elsa Perretti's sketchbook

**New Mexican Tinwork 1840 – 1940**
*by Lane Coulter and Maurice Dixon, Jr.*
University of New Mexico Press
Albuquerque, New Mexico, 1990
Clothbound, $35

Until now, decorative American tinwork, especially that of the 19th-century Southwestern United States has been in need of serious attention as a contemporary folk art. In this book, the first systematic appraisal of the subject, authors Coulter and Dixon have isolated in New Mexico a deep tradition of ornamental styles and regional iconography that supports Hispanic tinwork as invaluable to the understanding of southwestern material culture.

The survey relies primarily on devotional frames and nichos (niches or three-dimensional frames) and secondarily on lighting devices such as sconces and lanterns, all of which played a part in the rituals of Spanish Catholicism that was central to life in early New Mexican settlements. However, while these settlements resulted from the expansion of Spanish colonialism in North America, the research makes clear that the styles of New Mexican tinwork were not strictly derivative of Spanish/Mexican metalwork. The skills in working tin did travel north from Mexico, as did the need for religious imagery most often satisfied by native santeros (carvers of saints), but it wasn't until the mid-19th century and the arrival of the U.S. Army that trade routes to the east were opened, bringing with them the tin cans, window glass, inexpensive lithographs and wallpaper that became the raw materials of the frames and nichos.

The point is that although skills were in place, the tinworkers lacked materials, and when they became available they were in a manufactured form with built-in cultural symbols that were new to the community. The achievement of the tinworker, then, was not only the reworking, in technical fashion, of these new materials but more importantly the transformation, in esthetic fashion, of their symbolism to be understood and embraced as part of local tradition.

The circumstances of this cultural phenomenon are laid out in the first four chapters of the book that cover: history; tools, materials, processes; dating of tinwork, and their functional types. The heart of the book, which follows, is an exemplary portrayal of the tinsmiths themselves – present throughout the analysis of 13 regional workshops or local styles. The authors' backgrounds as studio artists invest their survey with a maker's perspective that views changes in culture in terms of new materials and their effect upon craft. Their detailed descriptions and sensitive appreciation of the craft illuminate the notable works currently in public and private collections. By and large, the language in the book betrays its purpose as a primer for the collector and historian. However, the authors' love of the metalwork comes through in their focus on the wealth and diversity of ornamental punching and cutting that can be achieved with rudimentary tools, as well as the imaginative license expressed in a few simple forms.

The final two chapters, which discuss the revival of New Mexican tinwork after WW I (often referred to as the "Santa Fe Style" in current decorating manuals) and the identification of Mexican tinwork, provide closure to the genre, distinguishing 19th-century New Mexican tinwork as a unique cycle of growth and decline, and thus a testimony to an art's intimate relationship with culture.

— Michael Dunas

**Elsa Peretti Catalog: Fifteen of My Fifty**
Tiffany & Co., portfolio; *presentation text by Richard Martin*
Exhibition at Fashion Institute of Technology, NY
April 24 – May 10, 1990

To mark both her 50th birthday and her 15-year partnership with Tiffany & Co., Elsa Peretti agreed to a major exhibition in a relatively minor New York City venue, the Fashion Institute of Technology. With a generous budget and free creative reign, the collaborative effort produced a most memorable exhibition. Its success was the result of a direct and tactile presentation that succeeded in capturing the feeling that both Peretti and her work have embodied.

The intimacy it conveyed was a surprise to those even vaguely familiar with the social circuit of this remarkably successful designer. She emerged from almost nowhere, eschewing her two-year training in interior design in Rome for a whirlwind career as an international model. She made the all-night rounds with the beautiful people and made close friends and mentors of her clients, Halston and Giorgio San Angelo.

Her first piece of jewelry, a silver bud vase dangling from a leather thong,was actually shown by San Angelo in his 1969 flower-child collection. It was Halston who, in 1974, took her to Walter Hoving (Chairman of the Board of Tiffany & Co. for 22 years), and had him sign her to a five-year exclusive contract. The store hadn't sold silver jewelry for 25 years. But Hoving grasped the possibilities. By 1977, Tiffany & Co. did over $6 million in sales with Peretti jewelry. Today she has over 1,600 designs in production (this figure includes home and personal accessories); Tiffany devotes almost one-quarter of its street-level selling floor to her work.

Installed in a darkened room, the exhibition used a series of thematic, spotlit assemblages to conjure the creative brainstorming surrounding the achievement of each of her seminal forms. Peretti's talent is in minimalizing and then sensualizing nature. She has, for example, used a bone as inspiration for everything from wrist cuffs to candlesticks and chignon fasteners. Thus, the particular tactile vignette offered to explicate the transformation of this bit of nature included not only the original bone of inspiration, but the sketchbook pages that show a bone belt being worked, discarded and worked again. Animal skulls, a chance human x-ray, random notes to the self, weathered crumbling bones, photos of these femurs "in situ" on the designer's mantle, this is the stuff that tumbles forth. We might be privy to molds, prototype carvings, false starts, mistakes. Each careful tableau proceeded from the wall with a tight arrangement of object photos, ad campaigns, artist sketches. Relevant objects and memorabilia could dangle or hang, providing a transition to the table height surface where further mementos surrounded the finished object. The structure of each display became a metaphor for the actualization process. Each assemblage was conceived as precious; its culminating object remained just beyond viewer reach. While there were no plexiglass cases, there was always an armed guard.

Among many other things, Peretti has designed a heart, bean, apple and tear that millions of women would instantly recognize. In every case the subject is visually pared to the sculptural stylization, a biomorphic essence of the nature-inspired form being signified. But it still remains literal and, hence, recognizable and appealing to a large audience. Each is then rendered in a material that enforces the life-affirming symbolism (silver, leather, wood, bamboo, ivory, crystal and later, gold and diamonds). All her essential forms fit easily into the hand. In fact, their size and sensuality, coupled with a laudable respect for materials, invite the hand for closer inspection. It is in the touching and the wearing, even more than the viewing, that Peretti objects provide their satisfaction.

In seizing upon her sensibility, Thomas Hoving saw that this sensual, organic simplicity could attract to Tiffany & Co. the burgeoning jewelry-wearing generation that was once the counter-culture. In the early days, the scale was small, the material only silver. For most of Tiffany's clientele it was almost antijewelry. But it was an immediate success, for an entirely new public. Peretti's naturalized minimalism became an emblematic jewelry esthetic for a generation that desired the sensibility of "fine" jewelry, in a modern and politically discreet format. Later it lost that particular trait, as high-karat gold and pavé diamonds upped the status quotient ante. By then it didn't matter.

— Vanessa Lynn

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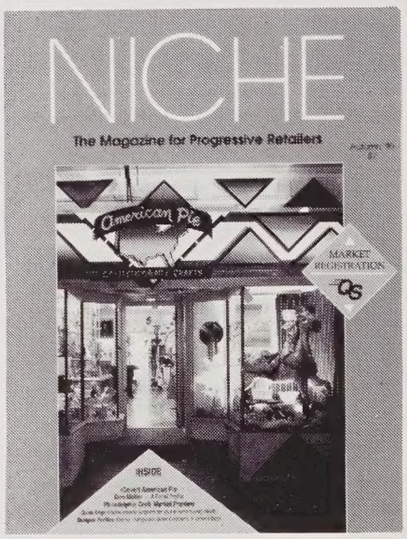


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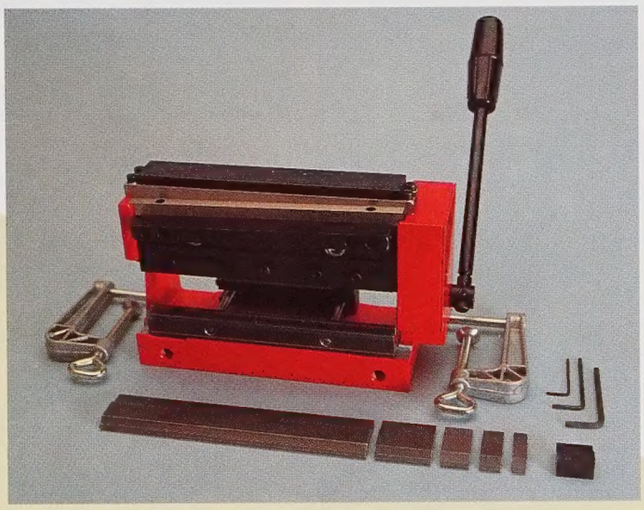

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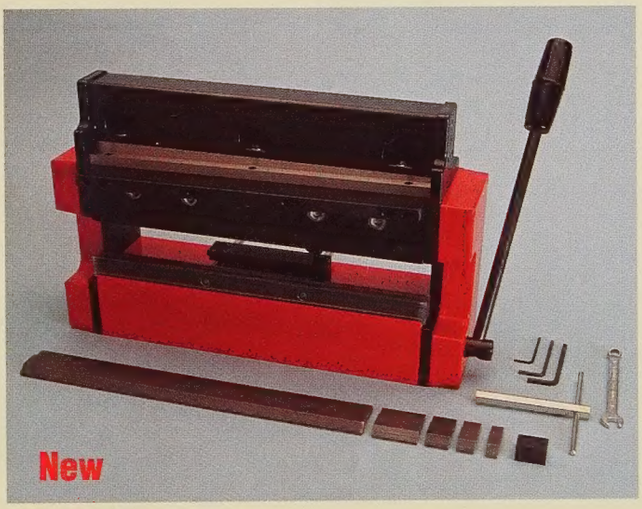


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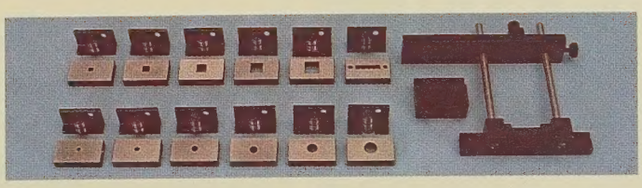

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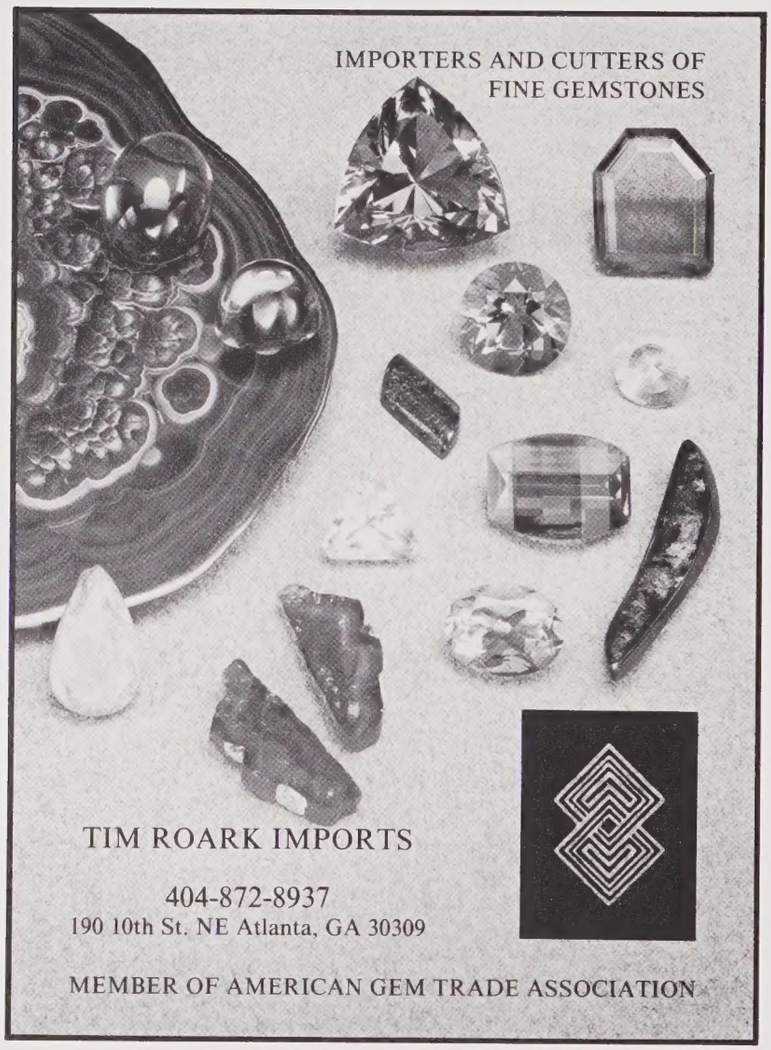

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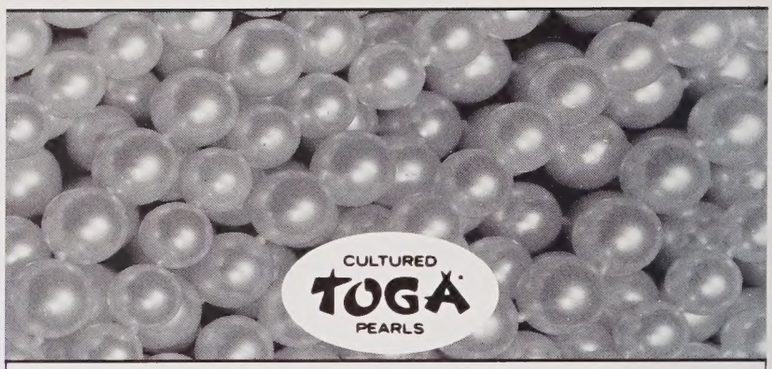


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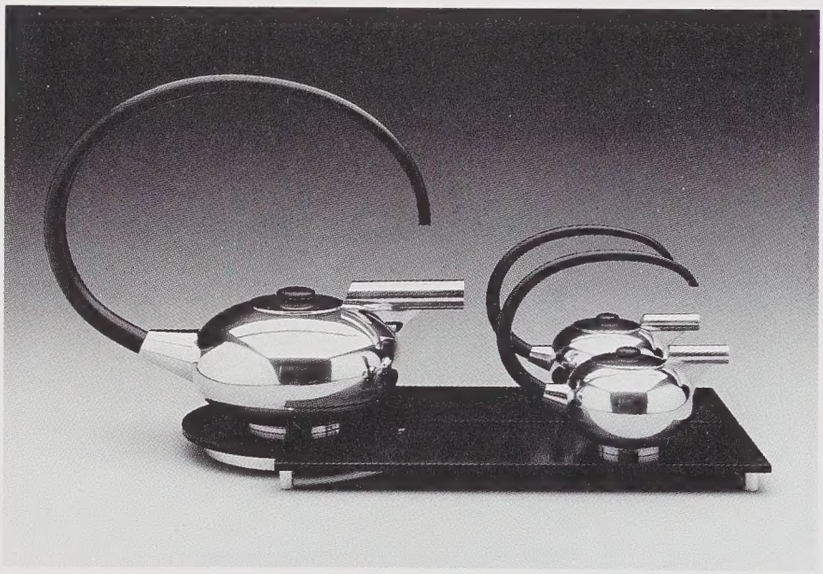

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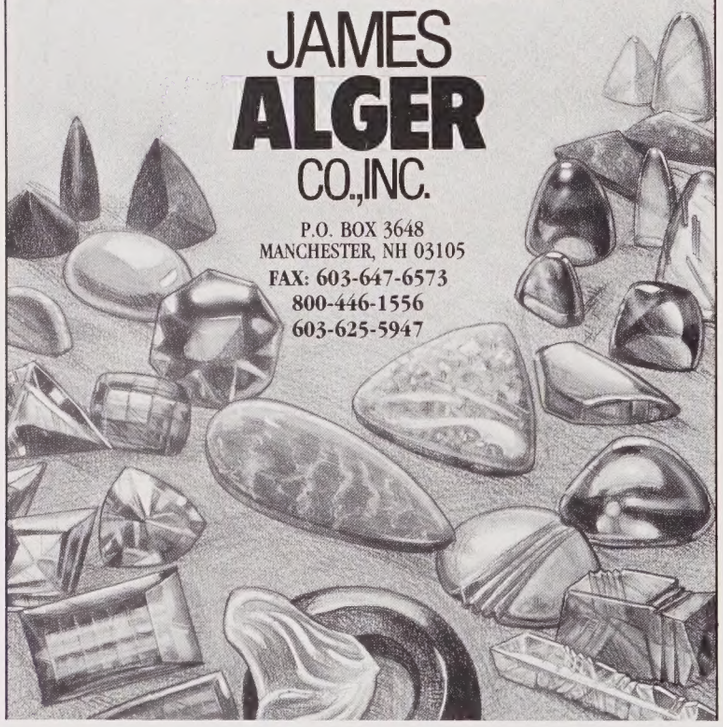

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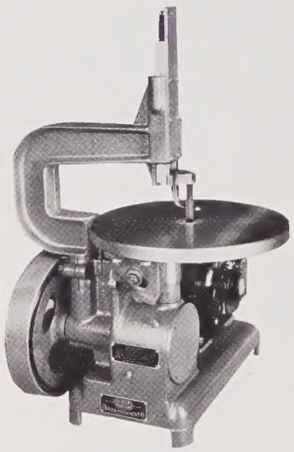

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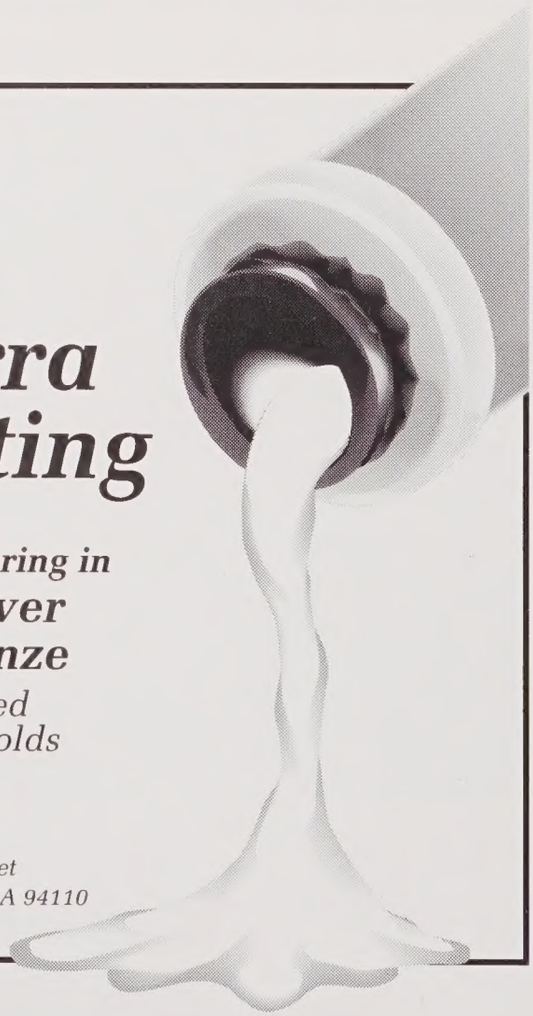

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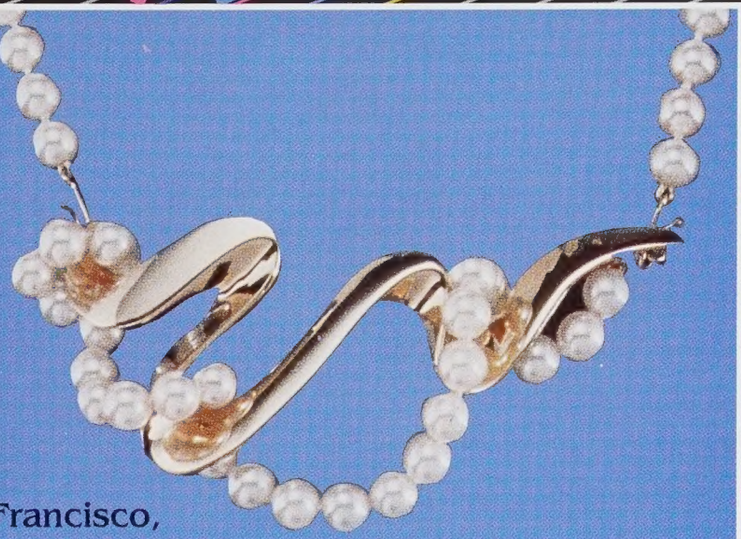

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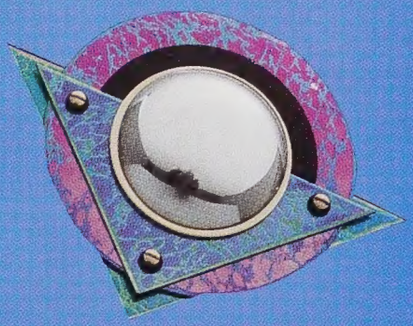

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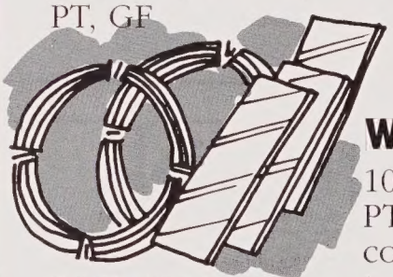

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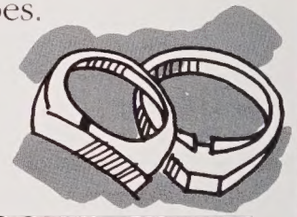

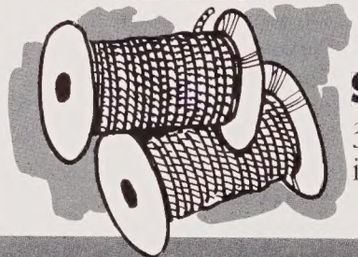

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The Society sponsors important exhibitions of contemporary metalwork. Past SNAG shows have been mounted at the Renwick Gallery, the St. Paul Museum of Art and several galleries in New York City. These exhibitions are usually restricted to members only.

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The Society operates a discount book service, through which important texts on all aspects of the field can be ordered at a reduced price.

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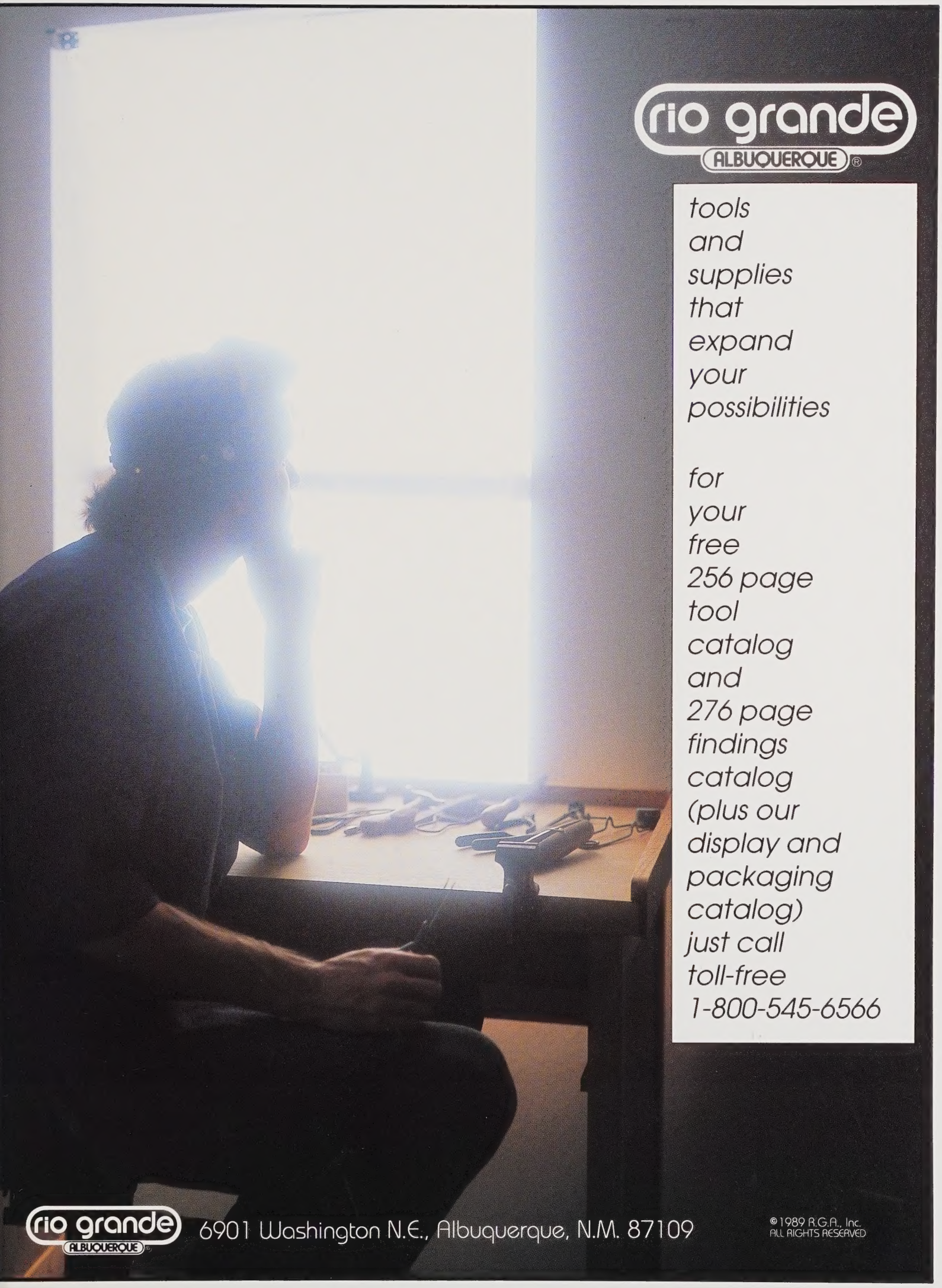

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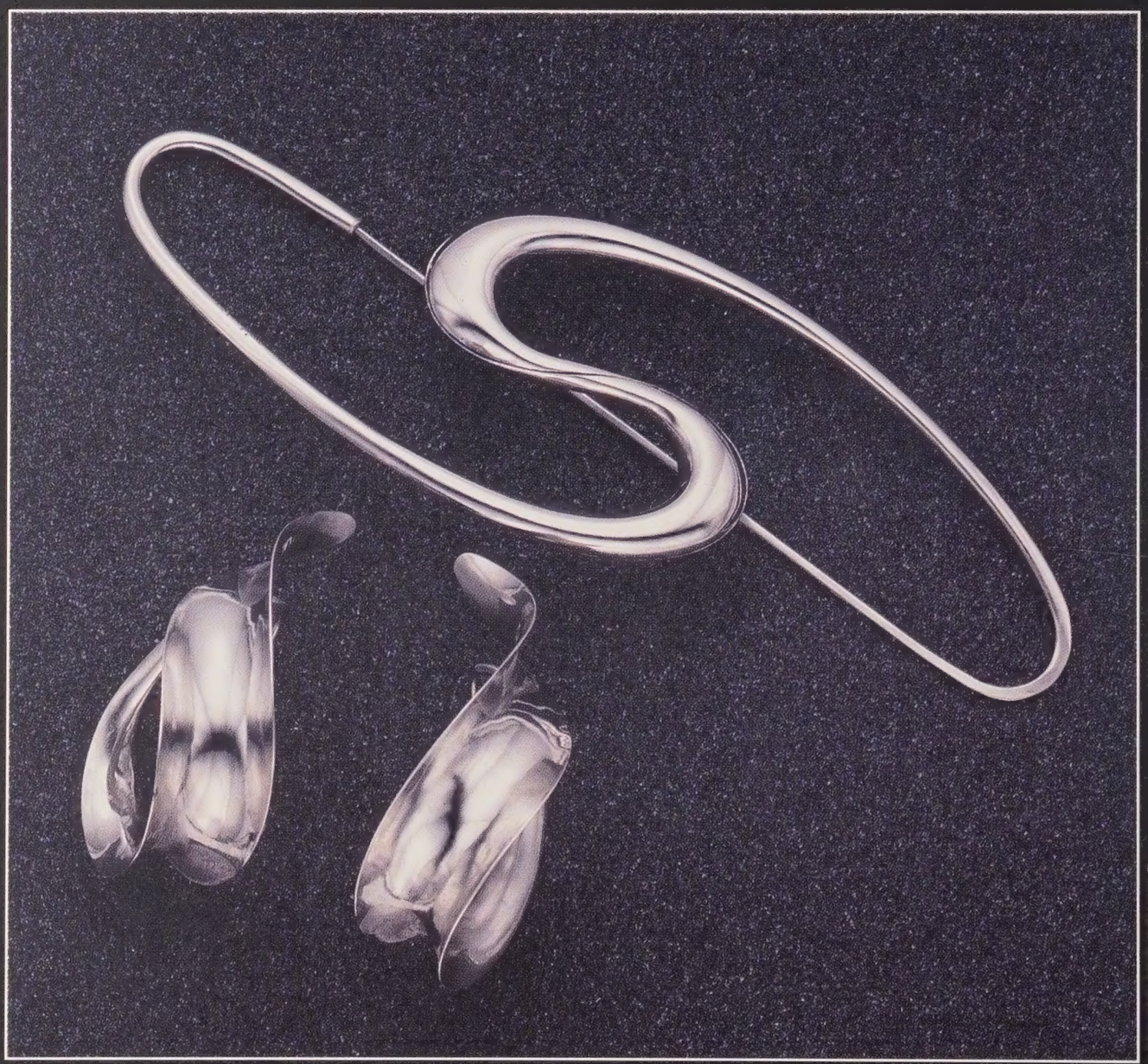

TED POBINER STUDIOS

P.O. Box 788 325 Commercial Street Rockport, Maine 04856 USA (207) 236-9619 (800) 422-9623